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WORK ON THE HORIZON

TRACKING EMPLOYMENT'S TRANSFORMATION IN EUROPE



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WORK IN MOTION

BY THE GREEN EUROPEAN JOURNAL

We used to talk about being in work or out of work. Today people increasingly lie somewhere in between: working part-time, ‘gigs’, or from project to project. Since the financial crisis of 2008, stagnant wages, precariousness, and rising inequality have become ever more common in Europe. Many continue to enjoy secure employment, the trend away from it is taking grip. Technology’s speed and reach are reorganising the time and space in today’s world of work. Crucially – amid demographic change, globalisation’s uncertain future, and long-term migratory patterns – peoples’ attitudes and expectations are evolving too.

The nature and purpose of work could be overturned in the years to come. Work in Europe is under attack and the first results are grim. Studies show that concerns over the scarcity of traditional employment feed resentment of political and economic elites, and are twisted into fear of the other. Yet work’s upheaval promises much good too. Flexibility and the automation of our most arduous and repetitive tasks extend human capacities, creativeness, and our ability to cooperate. However, it is not just about our jobs. For centuries, work has held a central place in our lives – social, political, and personal. It funds welfare states, marks identities, and drives personal accomplishment. How we recast work will shape our future society, from its social institutions and education systems, to its very sustainability and the lives we lead within it.

EDITO

With technology pushing the pace of production ever faster, the future of work is a subject of fear and fantasy. Yet though the weavers of 19th-century England smashed mechanised looms, the industrial age did not lack for work. In today's Europe, the same fears of machines casting humanity into obsolescence mirror some people's anticipation of fully automated leisure. Two perspectives on technology may be said to clash on fundamentals: a left-leaning narrative worried that the working class will be replaced and that of the tech billionaires looking forward to the robots. Faced with such uncertain prospects, some seek to seal off the national welfare state. Most just accept that entrepreneurial, atomised work is the best we can expect.

Despite technology's promise, growth in labour productivity per hour has plateaued, and even begun to retreat in some countries. Studies are divided on technology's eventual impact. Landmark Oxford Martin School research calculates that 47 per cent of US jobs are at risk from automation, while a cross-country OECD study estimates a mere 9 per cent. While many analyses predict a job market where skills and pay are polarised, the critical question of who will control the 3D printers, artificial intelligence, and data – our future means of production – is too often missing.

What's undeniable is that work is increasingly precarious for many. Labour law is being picked apart as we regress towards insecurity. Digital platforms, by no means just them, have skirted the established duties of employers. While forms of work resembling those of the past re-emerge, governments have looked on approvingly, or at a loss. New regulation will have to match the global reach of employers with ambition and clarity. Labour codes will need to reconcile the flexibility of modern (self-)employment with robust social protection, one of many challenges that progressives must answer in the years to come.

Too easily, Greens slide between the extremes of imagining a world without work and rejecting further liberalisation. Yet institutional

ORIAL

constraints in the name of protection can limit autonomy and freedom. Flexibility can allow for variety and independence and more balance between 'free' and working time could give people more opportunity to look after themselves and those around them. Breaking the connection between employment and quality of life offers a way out the dilemma. Part-time should not mean poverty. Welfare should not depend only on work. A societal shift relegating work from virtue to activity is needed. Trade unions and employers will have to reinvent themselves too to face new realities.

Four challenges stand tall for the Greens. First, they must build dialogue and, at times, alliances with business and organised labour to construct a shared vision of work's place in society. Second, lifelong learning will be central to this bargain to ease people's movement between working life and education. Third, beyond education, a fresh equilibrium between work and the rest of our time is needed. Proposals for a basic income, as trials continue across Europe, are starting to ask the right questions. Yet basic income cannot mean surrender to the invisible hand; achieving the social and economic changes we (and the planet) need will still take direction. So, finally, the forging of a sustainable industrial policy supporting Europe's role in the world is essential for shared prosperity. These challenges are European in nature: stark disparities in wages, working conditions, and regulation bear testament to the scant attention the European Union has paid to social issues since Maastricht. The as-yet-vague European Pillar of Social Rights and the forthcoming European Labour Authority are possible signs that, as 2019 elections approach, political space for action is opening up.

Work's present and future are not functions of immovable forces, there are powers at play and choices to make. Faced with the defining question of our time, Greens and progressives must avoid nostalgia or trepidation and realise instead that work's transformation is in our hands.

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THE RIGHT MATCH

FINDING WORK IN A FLEXIBLE FUTURE

AN INTERVIEW WITH
**BAS EICKHOUT &
ROBBY VANUXEM**

One person's freedom is another's insecurity in a job market where some skills are in high demand and others are at risk of replacement. Bas Eickhout, a Dutch GroenLinks MEP, and Robby Vanuxem, an expert from the world of business and managing director of recruitment specialist Hays Belgium, discuss changing attitudes to work, new employer-employee relationships, and the challenge for education and welfare systems.

GREEN EUROPEAN JOURNAL: In a context of digitalisation, mass unemployment, globalisation, and demographic change, what are the contemporary trends of the world of work in Europe?

ROBBY VANUXEM: Within this context, what we see is that human capital remains central. In our business as a recruitment agency, the key words are flexitime and flexible work. The change in mindsets among employers, but also among candidates, is noticeable. The trend is towards other ways of working, of planning careers, and of triggering and sustaining motivation. In other words, people are seeking not only flexibility timewise but flexibility on content and contracts, as seen in the increase of flexible contracts, freelancing, and project-based work.

BAS EICKHOUT: The trend towards flexibility is true for the service sector and I believe it is irreversible. However, flexibility can be a double-edged sword. Most employees would welcome more flexibility, not only in terms of what they do but also regarding their working-time arrangements to ensure a better professional-personal life balance. But employers are also exploiting the ongoing and increasing flexibility trend. One of the results is the fragmentation of the power

of labour unions and of collective bargaining. Freelancing and self-employment may be there to stay but it's somewhat fake – so far it means employment without the attached protections.

What are the changes in people's values towards work?

ROBBY VANUXEM: Young professionals, especially high-skilled candidates, increasingly care about the mission and the vision of the organisation they would work for and about how it contributes to society. They don't just put their values aside to climb the ladder and collect a good salary. They also seek better training options, work-life balance, and a stimulating work environment.

BAS EICKHOUT: I think we're seeing a new combination of formal work and care activities, and by caring I mean men taking more responsibility for childcare and so on. Caring for the elderly will become more important too. Another challenge I see is the changing value of lifelong learning. Employees are more and more expected to continue to learn and develop, so here there is a huge responsibility for employers. Employers cannot just say lifelong learning is something that you have to deliver as an employee.

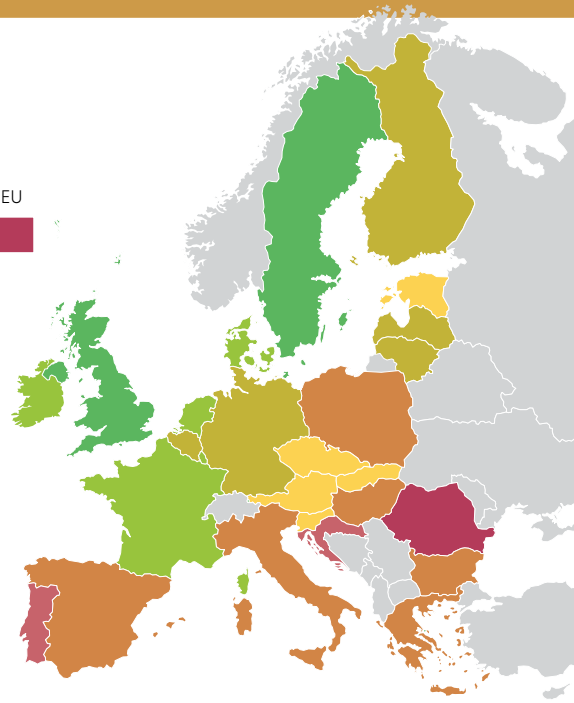
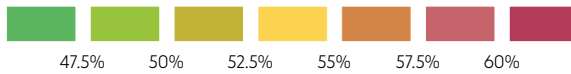
Are recruitment agencies – which have been mushrooming in the last decade or so – not a thing of the past with the rise of digital platforms and algorithmic decision-making screening candidates?

ROBBY VANUXEM: 15 years ago we had the same challenge when job boards and platforms such as StepStone and Monster were entering the market. Today, social media platforms are replacing job boards. But I see them more as a tool; social platforms and job boards help us do a better job. Ultimately, placing candidates in a job can't be replaced by a robot. If you want a good match between your candidate and client, you always need a human element.

So new professional career paths could see people go in and out of the job market. How do we ensure older workers do not feel treated unfairly, either discriminated against for not having digital skills or for lacking the required flexibility?

ROBBY VANUXEM: It is true that for companies the perfect candidate has often between 5 and 15 years of experience, specific skills, energy, and vision. As an expert recruitment company, we certainly have a role to play in explaining the added value of more senior workers to our clients. But if you really want to face the situation as a society, the government needs to invest in training and lifelong learning.

Percentage of jobs vulnerable to computerisation/automation in the EU



Technological advances place old jobs at risk

SOURCE: Bruegel calculation based on Frey & Osborne (2013), ILO, EU Labour Force Survey

BAS EICKHOUT: Tackling discrimination is a very difficult one, because it means fighting against deep-rooted prejudices. The government, in addition to employers, should actively invest in skills, especially for older workers. Practical options to address discrimination such as job applications that are anonymous or exclude certain data around age or gender, or greater use of written tests, can help too.

ROBBY VANUXEM: We've already put measures in place and we train our people to tackle discrimination. But we should not underestimate social media or the data available on professional social platforms. You can have regulations around fair recruiting, like Bas is saying, in terms of excluding certain data. However, employers will still find ways to discover the full background of a candidate before they recruit them. Big data and market intelligence is much bigger in terms of its use of personal data than the selection process or the work of recruitment agencies. The European Union can regulate our business using the General Data Protection Regulation, and it

should, but regulating data processes alone is certainly not enough. As we've seen with Facebook, there's a lot of data floating around that creates the risk of profiling. Making the data processes and the regulation around them air tight is not possible, or not yet. So, besides focusing on data security, we have to focus more proactively on lifelong learning and awareness raising. The government should take steps to highlight the strengths of more senior candidates and their added value on the labour market.

There are many other victims of discrimination in the world of work. How should their situation be addressed?

ROBBY VANUXEM: With an ageing population, it's necessary to work on the bottleneck jobs for which skills are lacking. The government needs to offer better support to incoming migrants in terms of integration programmes and, importantly, education for in-demand jobs. The care industry will be one such area for job seekers. The key factors in fighting

discrimination are the education system and the government's capacity to raise awareness about integration and its positive results.

BAS EICKHOUT: With the levels of migration into Europe, you cannot just have the old policy of “just get on with your job and that’s it.” Integration is key. It can come through jobs, but integration is also about learning the language and being part of society. We need to support these aspects of integration otherwise there will be divisions within society and the labour force. Regarding the fight against gender discrimination, governments should be absolute role models and I think that quotas for female participation are an excellent and necessary thing.

Moving on to Europe, data shows an increasing job polarisation between low-skilled workers and high-skilled workers. Robby, your business mainly deals with high-skilled job seekers. What do you see as the jobs of the future and how should we address this polarisation?

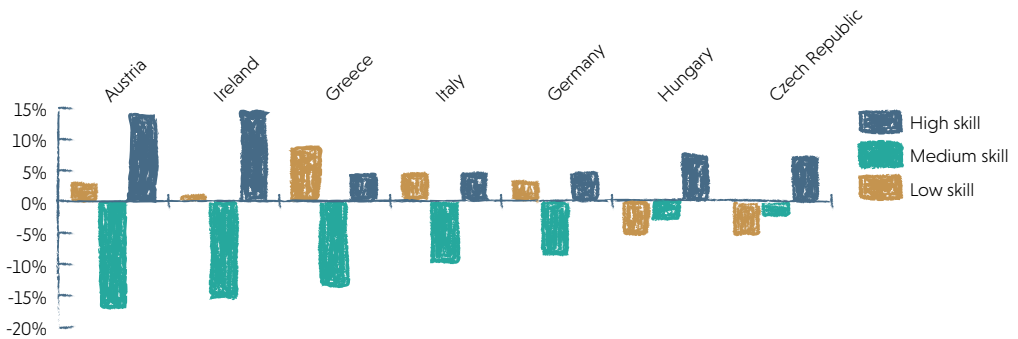
ROBBY VANUXEM: Jobs requiring medium skills will face the most competition from artificial intelligence and robotisation in the medium term, whereas low-skilled jobs will remain and the number of high-skilled jobs will increase. In the service industry, all activities from IT to privacy law to research and development require high-level technical skills. The same applies to engineering and construction, so

these are the jobs of the future. You need people to invent, maintain, and create, but the tasks in the middle can be automated. In Belgium, we face a serious challenge regarding the skills gap on every level of the labour market; there is a real mismatch between the skills available and the skills demanded by the market. In the medium term, we will also need to look at baby boomers and the replacement of their jobs.

BAS EICKHOUT: The political elite has a role to play here, but for now it is giving in to a self-fulfilling prophecy by basically saying that these are unavoidable trends. There are policy measures that are capable of addressing this job polarisation and its consequences. For example, it may sound very simple but if you set and enforce minimum wages at a decent level, then downward competition over wages will be less likely. It would limit the expansion of low-skilled jobs because companies will not be able to focus on low wages to stay competitive.

In a world of freelancing and flexibility where you work for one gig or project for a set fee, how, from an economic and labour market perspective, do you reconcile that with a minimum wage?

BAS EICKHOUT: To make sure existing trends in the labour market go hand in hand with income security, the big challenge is the revision of our social security systems, including welfare



Percentage point change in share of total employment from 1995 to 2015

SOURCE: OECD Employment Outlook 2017

payments, pensions, and so on. We need to upgrade social security for all, and to do that, it should be linked to citizenship and not just jobs, as it is now. The other aspect that needs to change to match increasing flexibility in the labour market is the development and application of much stricter labour law at the European level. At the European level, flexibility often means abuse of employees. On both social security and labour law, Member States are more and more reluctant to regulate while being innovative in their austerity measures. This situation can only create an explosive combination that will result in increasing inequality, in terms of income but also education and lifestyles.

ROBBY VANUXEM: There is a lot of talk about ‘Generation Y’, which is already on the labour market.¹ Generation Y has different expectations than earlier generations and we need to better understand the new flexibility in relations between employees and employers. Labour law and labour market institutions are not fully adapted to this new generation of the workforce. The format of social dialogue also needs to evolve. There are big differences

between countries like the Netherlands and countries such as Belgium or France where the negotiation systems with trade unions in their current form are outdated. Public opinion has less and less tolerance for tactics such as strikes. The hard-fought rights of baby boomers and previous generations are important but the lack of adaptation to the new reality is creating a palpable tension in the world of work today.

What about the future of the company? Are we seeing a sort of hyper-fragmented company – with outsourcing, offshoring, and global value chains – and the end of big firms with their economies of scale and lower transaction costs?

BAS EICKHOUT: Globalisation has the potential to fragment the entire value chain even further. But global competition means outsourcing to cheaper manufacturers and a potential race to the bottom for wages. Europe and its politicians have been naïve in thinking that further globalisation is an unavoidable and even trend. Globalisation produces winners and losers. I don’t say it very often but Donald Trump has a point here. He is basically saying

¹ Sometimes also referred to as ‘millennials’, Generation Y generally refers to people born between the 1980s and the early 2000s.

that global competition is not being done in a fair way and that the US should be more critical, protect its own industry (meaning the jobs and the skills that go with it), and therefore talk more to employers and employees. The current situation highlights once again that the EU lacks an industrial vision and has not answered the question of what do we want to produce ourselves and what sectors and professions do we want to develop.

From a Green political perspective, it is more urgent today than ever to think of ways to protect industrial manufacturing and actually lead globalisation, rather than just suffering it. The potential for Europe to lead globalisation and become pioneers of green industrial sectors such as the circular economy and the relocation of some production is huge and untapped. It will not be fulfilled as long as we have a Europe with one labour market and one internal market but with 28 taxation systems, each fighting the other with tax incentives and exemptions to attract investors and companies. As part and parcel of the future of work in Europe, we need to push for a single European corporate tax rate.

How does the service industry fit into this picture? Will it also suffer from the global competition that technology allows today?

ROBBY VANUXEM: For at least the last decade, there has been a trend of service sector companies resorting to service centres abroad

and globalising their services by outsourcing to more or less far away countries such as Poland, Turkey, and even further away in Asia. But over the last five years, we have also started to see companies from Belgium and the Netherlands rolling back and relocating to Europe. Service companies see that customers are very demanding and do not want to waste time or lose quality by having to deal with people who are not aware of their reality or do not speak their language.



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A LABOUR CODE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

ARTICLE BY
ALAIN SUPIOT

Today's labour laws were designed for a world of work that no longer exists. The pressures of neoliberalism on the individual and society require labour laws that go beyond defending or destroying past certainties and that instead give workers power over the quality, organisation, and purpose of their work.

You'd have to be blind to deny the need for fundamental reform of labour laws. Throughout history, technological advances have always led to a restructuring of institutions. This was the case in past industrial revolutions which, after overturning the old order by opening the floodgates to proletarianisation, colonisation, and the industrialisation of war and killing, resulted in the rebuilding of international institutions and the invention of the welfare state. The post-war period of peace and prosperity enjoyed by European countries can be credited to this new kind of state and the foundations upon which it was built: integrated and efficient public services, a social safety net covering the whole population, and labour laws that guaranteed workers a minimum level of protection.

FR

This article was first published by *Le Monde diplomatique* in October 2017 and is available on its English website www.mondediplo.com

ET SI L'ON REFONDAIT LE DROIT DU TRAVAIL...

Les évolutions politiques et sociales appellent à une réforme sérieuse du droit du travail pour mieux protéger mais aussi pour dépasser l'économisme rampant.

These institutions, born of the second industrial revolution, have now been called into question, undermined by neoliberal policies that lead to a social, fiscal, and environmental race to the bottom between nations, and by the digital revolution that is dragging the world of work from one of manual labour to one of knowledge.¹ 'Connected' workers are no longer expected to follow orders like robots but instead to respond in real time to the information they receive. These political and technological factors work together. Even so, they should not be conflated, because neoliberalism is a reversible political choice whereas the digital revolution is an irreversible fact that can serve different political ends.

Technological change fuelling current debates around automation, the end of work, and ‘uberisation’ could exacerbate the dehumanisation of work engendered by Taylorism just as easily as it could lead to the adoption of the “humane conditions of labour” stipulated in the constitution of the International Labour Organization (ILO). This constitution sets out to achieve employment in which workers have “the satisfaction of giving the fullest measure of their skill and attainments and make their greatest contribution to the common well-being.”² Such a prospect would be an improvement on the salaried employment model, rather than a return to the ‘commodification of work’.

EMPLOYMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY: AN EVOLVING BARGAIN

Until the 1970s, employment involved a bargain: obedience in exchange for security. Employees gave up any sort of autonomy over their work in return for a limit on working hours, collective bargaining, and protection against loss of work. This model, implemented in various legal forms in every industrialised nation, reduced social justice to the quantitative terms of the exchange of labour and physical safety at work, and to trade union freedoms. But work itself – its content and conduct – was excluded from this bargain. In both capitalist

and communist societies, work was considered a question of ‘scientific organisation’ – or so-called Taylorism. There was no place for autonomy, which remained the privilege of senior executives and the self-employed.

The digital revolution offers a chance for all workers to acquire greater autonomy, yet at the same time it risks subjecting everyone – including the self-employed, executives, and professional classes – to aggravated forms of dehumanised work. This revolution is not limited to the spread of new technologies; it is shifting the centre of gravity of economic power, which lies less in the material ownership of the means of production than in the intellectual ownership of information systems. Today, this power is exercised less in orders to follow than in objectives to meet.

Unlike previous industrial revolutions, it is not physical exertion that new technologies save and surpass, but mental ones, or more precisely, memorisation and calculation capacities that can be deployed to complete any programmable task. They are incredibly powerful, fast, and obedient but also, as computer scientist Gérard Berry says, totally stupid.³ They allow humans to concentrate on the ‘poetic’ side of work – that which requires imagination, nuance or creativity, and is therefore not programmable.

1 Michel Volle (2017). *Anatomie de l'entreprise. Pathologies et diagnostic*. In Pierre Musso (Ed.), *L'Entreprise contre l'État?* Manucius, Paris.

2 Declaration of Philadelphia (1944).

3 Gérard Berry (2008). *Pourquoi et comment le monde devient numérique*. *Annuaire du Collège de France*.

The digital revolution will also be a source of new dangers if, rather than placing computers at the service of humans, we organise human work on the model of computer work. Instead of subordination giving way to greater autonomy, work would take the form of rule by numbers, extending to the mind the grip that Taylorism once held over the body.

This quixotic quest to programme human beings cuts them off from the experience of reality; it explains the growth in mental health problems and the rise in exactly the type of number-fiddling once seen in planned Soviet economies. Tasked with hitting impossible targets, a worker has little choice: either sink into depression or game the system to satisfy performance indicators that are removed from reality. The cybernetic fantasy underlying governance by numbers chimes perfectly with the neoliberal promise of globalisation, namely the self-regulation of a ‘large open society’ by the forces of an all-encompassing market. That is why this type of government is spreading, to the detriment of what the Universal Declaration of Human Rights terms rule of law.

It is not, therefore, in the time-worn formulas of neoliberalism that we can hope to find the legal tools for taming information technology and civilising its use so that it frees rather than alienates the human mind. These formulas, administered in massive doses over the last 40 years, have helped to shape the world we

live in: one of overuse of natural resources, the domination of the economy by finance, sharply rising inequalities of all kinds, the mass migration of people fleeing war and poverty, the return of religious violence and nationalism, the decline of democracy, and the rise to power of strong men with weak ideas. Common sense would have it that, rather than persevere in error by mechanically applying the ‘structural reforms’ prescribed by those responsible for this disaster, we should instead learn from these mistakes, particularly in the field of law.

What is unique to neoliberalism – and sets it apart from classical liberalism – is the way it treats the law in general, and labour law in particular, as a legislative product competing in an international market for regulations where a race to the bottom in social, fiscal, and environmental standards reigns supreme. Rule of law is thus replaced by law ‘shopping’, subordinating the law to economic calculations rather than vice versa.

RE-FRAMING LABOUR LAW: LOOKING BEYOND EMPLOYMENT

The great simplifiers who today rail against labour laws are the very same people who, year after year, do everything they can to make them more complicated and burdensome. Before the ink is dry on the latest law they are already drafting the next. As the government

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can no longer pull any of the major macroeconomic levers (control of currency and borders, the exchange rate, public spending) that affect employment, it yanks ever harder on the only lever it has left: labour laws, which are characterised as an obstacle to employment. Yet no serious research backs up this argument.

Since the requirement for prior authorisation of dismissal was abolished in France in 1986 (something that remains in force in the Netherlands, which has an unemployment rate of 5.1 per cent), the extraordinary promises that accompany each new deregulation of the labour market have never materialised. Indeed, in Europe, unemployment rates remain highest in the southern countries that have championed deregulation.⁴ But there has been no review of reforms to company law (for example, allowing share buybacks that permit shareholders to enrich themselves without giving up anything in return, destroying capital and undermining investment), accounting law (like the abandonment of conservatism in favour of ‘fair value’⁵), or finance law (such as the existence of private banks that are ‘too big to fail’ and therefore enjoy an inviolability denied to indebted states). Changes whose negative effects on investment and employment are proven. In current newspeak, limiting compensation for unfair dismissal is described as a ‘brave reform’, whereas limiting the gains from stock options that an executive may receive through such firings is seen as demagoguery.

Any serious reform of labour laws – the last reform worthy of the name in France was in 1982 – should aim for more economic democracy, otherwise political democracy will only continue to waste away. Ideally, it should give everyone more autonomy and control in their working lives by providing new active safeguards, which allow people to take the initiative and complement the passive safeguards inherited from the

⁴ In 2017, the official unemployment rate was 11.2 per cent in Italy, 17.2 per cent in Spain, and 21.5 per cent in Greece. Eurostat [june_rt_a].

⁵ Replacing the old accounting principle of prudence or conservatism, this standard indexes the value of a company’s assets against their estimated market price, conjuring up purely hypothetical wealth. See Jacques Richard (November 2005). Une comptabilité sur mesure pour les actionnaires. *Le Monde diplomatique*. bit.ly/2qMw8dT

ANY REFORM
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Fordist model. But this cannot be done without taking into account the profound changes in the organisation of companies and work that have occurred since the 1980s.

The first condition for such a reform would be to extend labour law beyond employment to encompass all types of economically dependent work. Today, the digital revolution and the start-up model are resurrecting hopes of empowerment through self-employment and small cooperatives. But in reality, there has been a blurring of the lines between independent self-employment and dependent self-employment, with workers bound by ties of fealty that reduce their autonomy to varying extents. In the same way, the idea that digital platforms that bring together workers and the users of their services will be a boon for self-employment is not borne out by the facts, as shown by class actions filed by Uber drivers, with some success, to force the company to recognise them as employees.

In the face of this change, economic dependence should be the criterion for an employment contract, as recommended by a thought-provoking set of proposals put forward by a group of French academics.⁶ Adopting this criterion would simplify labour law while linking the degree of protection enjoyed by workers to their dependence. Management by objectives has seen the return of the old legal structure of 'feudal tenure', in which a tenant would pledge fealty to a landlord in return for the right to work a plot of land. The re-emergence of such ties has been made possible by digital tools that allow owners to control the work of others without giving them orders.

These ties of fealty form the legal framework of the network economy and are found in different guises at every level of work: from chief executives subject to the whims of their shareholders or customers down to salaried employees, of whom flexibility is demanded – they

⁶ Emmanuel Dockès (2017). *Proposition de code du travail*. Dalloz, Paris.

have to be responsive and available at all times. Debates around uberisation highlight the need for a legal framework that can keep promises (of autonomy) and mitigate the risks (of exploitation) inherent in these situations of fealty.

ENVISIONING REFORMS

In this context, any reform that places company-level bargaining at the centre of labour law is clearly obsolete and irrelevant. This may have been appropriate in the United States in 1935, when the National Labor Relations Act was adopted as part of the New Deal, but it does not resolve the problems posed by today's interconnected and transnational organisation of work.

The first question is: which mechanisms allow workers to take back a degree of control over the meaning and content of their work? In France, the right of employees to collective expression, enshrined in the 1982 Auroux laws, started this process, which should be continued by making work design and organisation a matter for collective bargaining and individual awareness. Today, the issue is only addressed negatively, when this organisation leads to suicides or psychosocial disorders. It needs rather be addressed positively and preventively.

It should be possible to conduct collective bargaining at the correct levels, not just at industry or company level. Two of these in particular merit attention: supply-chain and territory levels. Such bargaining would enable the specific interests of dependent businesses to be taken into account; these may converge with those of their employees in relation to the companies on which they depend. Or it may involve all stakeholders with an interest in a particular region's dynamism. The head-to-head dynamic of employer/employee in a company or industry is no longer adequate; it requires the presence of other stakeholders around the negotiating table.

A third area for reform concerns the sharing of responsibilities within networks of companies. These networks allow those who control them to exercise economic power while palming off their responsibilities onto subordinates. It is therefore a matter of linking the responsibility of each member of the network to the degree of autonomy that they actually enjoy.⁷ Such a reform would clarify the grey area surrounding corporate social responsibility as it currently stands, which is to neoliberalism what paternalism was to liberalism. Where necessary, it would make dominant companies jointly responsible for the harm caused by the work organisation that they create and control.

7 Mireille Delmas-Marty & Alain Supiot (2015). *Prendre la responsabilité au sérieux*. PUF, Paris.

At an international level, we should fully acknowledge what is stated in the preamble to the ILO's constitution: "The failure of any nation to adopt humane conditions of labour is an obstacle in the way of other nations which desire to improve the conditions in their own countries." And we should take account of the fact that the international division of labour and our environmental impact on the planet are inseparable. Social and environmental standards must therefore be given the same legal force as those governing international trade. This would require the creation of an international dispute settlement body with the power to authorise countries complying with these standards to close their markets to products made under conditions that do not.⁸ The European Union could regain political legitimacy by championing such a reform, thus renewing the commitment enshrined in EU treaties to "improved living and working conditions, so as to make possible their harmonisation while the improvement is being maintained", rather than encouraging a social and fiscal race to the bottom between Member States, as its Court of Justice does.

Ambitious reform of labour law should also include unpaid work, such as raising children and caring for elderly parents, which is as

vital for society as it is ignored by economic indicators. Ever since artificial lighting made working 24 hours a day possible, labour law has provided a spatial and temporal framework compatible with our biological clock and the (human) right to respect for private and family life. This framework is now threatened by neoliberalism and information technology, which together extend paid work to any place and any time.⁹ The price, particularly in terms of family life, is exorbitant but never acknowledged by those obsessed with Sunday and night working, which are destroying the last vestiges of social time to have escaped the commodification of human life.



ALAIN SUPIOT

is a professor at the Collège de France, member of the International Labour Organization's Global Commission on the Future of Work, and author of *Governance by Numbers* (Hart Publishing, 2017).

⁸ The use of new forms of collective action, including boycotting such products, would also be recognised as a right inherent to freedom of association and the right to organise.

⁹ Laurent Lesnard (2009). *La famille désarticulée. Les nouvelles contraintes de l'emploi du temps*. PUF, Paris.

WORK&SONS



THE GIG WORKERS ON TAP

AN INTERVIEW

WITH **LISBETH**

BECH POULSEN,

BARTŁOMIEJ KOZEK,

KAROLIEN LENAERTS

& LORENZO ZAMPONI

The rise of the ‘gig economy’ has turned food-box-burdened bikers into a commonplace sight in many European cities. Less visible but equally ‘gigified’ are the care, cleaning, and high-end service sectors. While definitions vary, they agree on how the gig economy uses software to connect workers in the crowd to consumers, and algorithms to tailor and track their services. Four panellists discuss the perils and possibilities of this innovative way of organising work, and how governments can keep up.

GREEN EUROPEAN JOURNAL: The ‘gig economy’ promises business savings on employee benefits, office space, and training, plus the ability to bring in experts only when a specific need arises. For a freelancer, it might improve work-life balance. But does the reality so far live up to the ideal?

LORENZO ZAMPONI: The negative sides of the gig economy are much more evident. To a large extent, what we call the gig economy these days is simply a more extreme form of the long-known phenomena of the flexibilisation and precarisation of work – at least in Europe. The platforms that hire gig workers benefit from maximum levels of flexibility and effectively obtain a pay-as-you-go workforce. The gig economy label serves to hide what is in practice a very traditional subordinate employment relation in order to avoid the obligations to fulfil legal and social rights that traditional labour relations entail. It’s not that there aren’t opportunities in growing sectors, such as food delivery, that use gig workers. The gig economy can lead to job creation, but it has to be much better regulated.

KAROLIEN LENAERTS: One of the things that crops up quite often in the literature is the necessity of finding a balance between, on one hand, supporting innovation, encouraging new business models, and creating new opportunities in the labour market, and, on the other hand, ensuring that those who work in the gig economy are properly protected. When it comes to new opportunities, there is this belief that platforms can create jobs, and that people who struggle in the regular labour market such as immigrants, disabled people, or single parents can use platforms to get access to work. However, there is very little empirical evidence supporting this at the moment. Moreover, we don't know the next step once these people have gained access to work. For example, if someone finds a job through a platform, is it stable, is it fixed employment, and can they move on to something else? Or, is gig work just a trap that they fall into when they lack other job opportunities? It is important to mention that the gig economy is a very heterogeneous phenomenon and, as the trend develops in Europe, it becomes ever more so.

BARTŁOMIEJ KOZEK: In Poland, the gig economy entered into broad public discussion last year, when cab drivers protested against Uber on the streets of Polish cities. Opinion was split two ways. One view argued we should keep the labour market as it is, and either ban Uber or make the company and its drivers subject to the same regulations as taxi cab drivers

and firms. On the other hand, a techno-optimistic and libertarian view presented Uber as an inevitable trend not just to be accepted but also embraced. Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, for example, sees the 'sharing economy' sector as a great business opportunity. But what is lacking in Poland is a discussion about the future of work as such, about how we can regulate and shape work, and on what levels we should deal with it. Currently we have a patchwork of different regulations and mentalities, as demonstrated by the jumble of approaches that different municipalities take towards Uber.

LISBETH BECH POULSEN: The general debate in Denmark is similar to what Bartłomiej has described. Some hold techno-optimistic views and claim that we should not regulate exciting business opportunities. Others are very critical of the gig economy for reasons including taxation, labour conditions, and inequality. The current government in Denmark has created a so-called 'disruption council' with the mandate of promoting these new kinds of businesses and innovations. The council has a very narrow view, however. It basically looks at the interests of the companies and at what can boost economic growth. Social and ethical considerations are absent from their agenda.

In Denmark, traditionally working conditions have been negotiated between employers and employees, and that set-up has worked

well for many years. But now it is definitely challenged by the gig economy. Denmark doesn't have a legal minimum wage, and, as platforms often reject participating in the negotiation rounds upon which the Danish model is based, gig economy workers often end up on very low salaries. We had a case with Uber a couple of years ago when the company was not ready to negotiate with the politicians and regulators of the country. Frankly, the representatives of the company were quite arrogant. They said that Uber wanted to be in Denmark but it didn't want to negotiate the terms of their activities. In the end, a Danish court ruled their activities illegal as 'pirate taxis'. Now, the company is coming back, claiming it wants to negotiate a deal on the terms and conditions of work, including wages, but it will still be difficult to find an acceptable solution.

You have already mentioned that many of the gig economy workers have to navigate an unregulated environment, often earning not much more than a minimum wage. What could be done to protect these workers?

LISBETH BECH POULSEN: In Denmark, we have platforms providing cleaning services where you hire somebody to clean your apartment. These companies are very firm on the point that these people are not employees but freelancers. They claim to simply provide a platform where entrepreneurs meet potential clients. Obviously, the reason that they are so firm on that point is because they don't want to bear their responsibilities as employers. This position, however, poses a major problem for governments on all levels. Because if these platforms don't shoulder their responsibilities then there

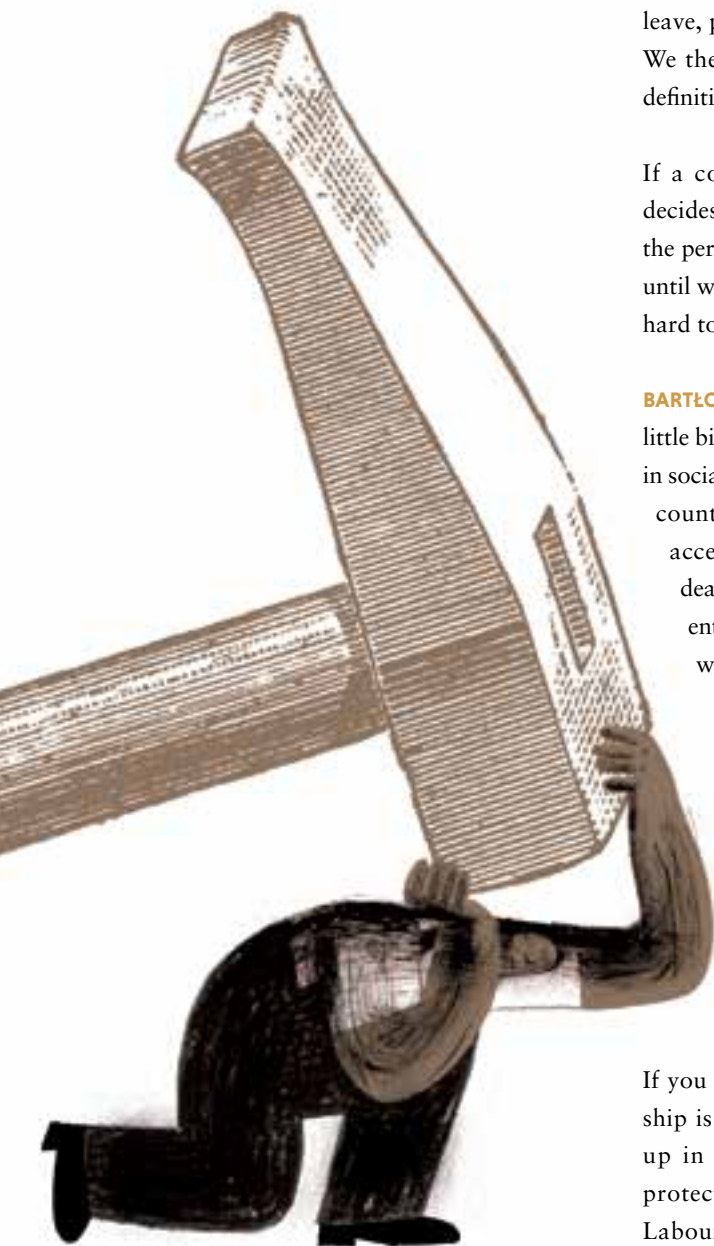


will be no contributions paid for maternity leave, pensions, health insurance, and so on. We therefore need to introduce a clear-cut definition of employment.

If a company commands somebody and decides the rate at which this person works, the person is an employee – by definition. Yet until we have this definition in place, it is very hard to move forward.

BARTŁOMIEJ KOZEK: I would like to step back a little bit, because regulations are implemented in social settings and these settings differ from country to country. If regulations are not accepted socially then they can become dead letters. In the case of Poland, the term entrepreneurship bears a lot of ideological weight, ever since the fall of communism. Entrepreneurs are seen as the people driving our economy and the number of self-employed people in Poland is among the highest in Europe. However, almost 20 per cent of these people chose self-employed status not out of their own will, but because they have no other opportunity to work.

If you have a situation where entrepreneurship is not an option but a ‘must’, you end up in a situation where promoting and protecting labour rights is really difficult. Labour unions are losing their importance



in Poland, as they are other countries of the region such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary. Traditional labour organisations are seen as backward looking and damaging to a country's business prospects. Now, if we look at what we should regulate, we have to divide it into two major categories. First, we need to decide how to regulate labour markets. In this case, in Poland it is important to refer to the Supreme Court decision that ruled that unionisation is not only limited to workers with permanent jobs. The self-employed or people working on so-called 'junk contracts' have the right to organise too.

A second, very important issue regarding technological progress and our labour market is whether we have the option to provide our workers with other opportunities to work under fairer conditions. For example, the New Economics Foundation in the UK is creating a new e-hailing application to promote better working standards.¹ Finally, when so many online platforms are building their business models on exploiting user-specific information, we need to have proper regulation to make sure people can control their own data.

KAROLIEN LENAERTS: There are a few things that I would like to point out. First of all, there are many different realities in the platform economy. We have click workers who earn a

few cents per task, and Deliveroo bikers and Uber drivers, whose earnings can be close to the minimum wage, or well below it. At the other end of the spectrum, we have genuine entrepreneurs who use these platforms to find new opportunities and often charge very high wages, just as they would in a regular setting. Motivation can differ greatly from person to person, making discussions on wages and employment status more complex.

The point Bartłomiej raised regarding data protection reminded me of the transparency issue. Precisely because all transactions and tasks are digitalised, the gig economy is a real opportunity to lift some activities out of the black market. On the other hand, digitalisation does lead to data protection issues.

LORENZO ZAMPONI: We shouldn't forget that lack of regulation is at the core of gig economy business models. These companies' profits depend on them having no formal employees but being able to rely on a pool of fake freelancers, on demand to perform specific menial tasks. In most cases, there is nothing really innovative about these platforms. Instead, all they do is exploit loopholes in regulation and duck their responsibilities towards their employees. There are many ways to approach this. You can force companies to abide by existing regulations, or

¹ The New Economics Foundation is running a crowdfunding campaign to launch an alternative to Uber that will protect workers' rights and adopt an ownership structure that redistributes profits to drivers and customers alike. The app is provisionally called CabFair: bit.ly/2JshJkD

you can create incentives for employees to use platform-based cooperatives to organise their work. I refer to them as employees because it is hard to look at people wearing corporate uniforms and following strict timetables and see them as freelancers.

We also have to look at how this market works, and I don't think we have seen enough yet to judge. The market, especially in the delivery field, is still in a transition phase. Many of these platforms operate in winner-takes-all markets, so companies are investing heavily to conquer a high position. Soon, it may look like the social media market, where we see a monopolist who makes profit because it is able to destroy competition – it's something we should follow with attention.

Karolien, what are the main findings of your cross-country analysis of policy responses to the gig economy?

KAROLIEN LENAERTS: We noticed that the discussion among policy-makers was mainly about mitigating negative impacts and that competition, taxation, the support of innovation, and entrepreneurship were the highest ranking priorities. There has been much less discussion about labour protection, access to social services, representation, and organisation. Subnational governments were usually the front-runners in trying to find solutions, whereas the national governments

seemed to be more absent, especially at the beginning. Many national governments looked for guidance from the European level. But since there is so little knowledge, it is very difficult to come up with a good solution. Once more people became exposed to these platforms, both as workers and consumers, regulators realised that they needed to look beyond issues of competition and taxation. In most of the countries, this realisation promoted an increased focus on employment issues. Because of how labour laws are framed, there is a binary situation where you can either be an employee and have all the rights that legislation upholds, or you are self-employed, and then you are on your own.

The introduction of a 'third status', specific to gig economy workers, was a point that came up quite often. Most regulators have turned away from this kind of idea by now, since the framework of labour legislation is already complicated enough in most countries. All in all, we can say that governments have taken very different approaches, but their responses have been late. They are trying to see what developments we are going to experience and how public opinion reacts. For now, the most interesting regulatory examples can be found in France. Labour law has been changed and the right to organise has been extended to make sure that crowd workers can also organise and join or start a union themselves.

Lisbeth, what can policy-makers do to regulate the gig economy?

LISBETH BECH POULSEN: Last autumn, the Danish government came up with a package of initiatives under the headline ‘Promoting the sharing economy’. The government calls everything in the gig economy ‘sharing economy’, just because it sounds nice. Thereby, they put Uber, Airbnb, the click workers, and many others in the same box, and they convey that this is a positive development for our labour market. Regulators are trying to make it easier for consumers to access services, as well as for businesses to operate. But dealing with working conditions only comes up at the margins.

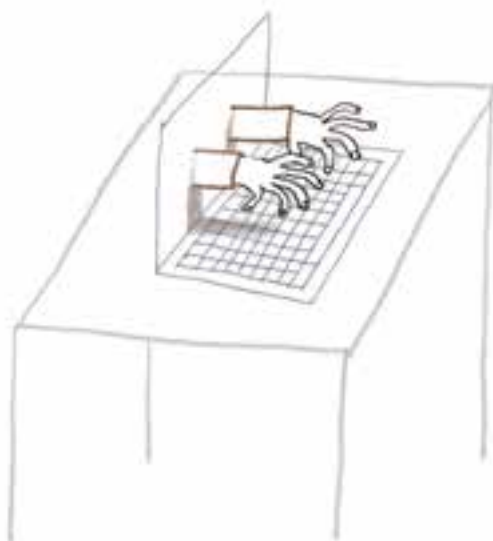
We have to adapt our fights to different platforms, because regulating Airbnb, Uber, or care-sharing initiatives is not the same. We have to look at these different companies separately. However, we can definitely say that working conditions are under-regulated across the board. But regulation is a difficult issue in Denmark because there has always been collective bargaining between employers and employees. Neither the employers nor the employees welcome us as politicians entering that arena via regulation. Most people in Denmark really

appreciate the collective bargaining system and so we need social actors, the labour movement, and unions to play a bigger part in the process. But they are also puzzled, and fail to understand what is going on in our labour markets.



Bartłomiej, what has been the Eastern European experience in terms of regulation?

BARTŁOMIEJ KOZEK: I agree that different companies and different sectors need different regulations, but that also requires the gig economy discussion to become more technical and nuanced over time. I think we need to take a step back and discuss how we can prepare our labour market for the future. For that, the most important component would be to focus on our educational system and to create real opportunities for young people to deal with the challenges to come. Education for the future is at least as important as regulation. The other task would be to create a level playing field for traditional and new actors on the labour market. In Poland, for a long time many young people had no other possibilities than to work on junk contracts without access to social security. These situations are unacceptable, and no market player should be allowed to benefit from them. Take the case of Uber drivers in Poland, among whom many are Ukrainian – thanks to the gig economy, they have a new source of income. Yet while many may be able to live a decent life here, their status puts them at risk of not having the same access to social protection as others in Poland.



Lorenzo, what opportunities, if any, do gig workers have to organise and unionise?

LORENZO ZAMPONI: With the rise of the gig economy, it has become even harder to build a social identity around the way someone makes a living, let alone to politically empower that identity. Unionisation, and the organisation of workers in general, is much more difficult. There is also a large heterogeneity among gig workers. In the food delivery sector, you have students who want to earn something on the side and 30-year-olds who work 12 hours a day to make a living. The prospects of identifying with the job and forming a collective or a grassroots organisation dealing with labour issues are definitely stronger for the older workers than the students.

A second point crucial to political organisation is that people's minds are divided between their identities as workers and consumers. As consumers, we want to pay as low prices as possible, but we have to realise that this is

connected to lower salaries. This contradiction is often hard to reconcile. The gig economy has a big symbolic component, however: food delivery companies make a profit out of the fact that their riders project a cool, fresh, and environment-friendly image. This appeal makes the companies vulnerable in the public scene. Attempts at collective action by workers have been successful on the discursive level and the techno-optimistic narrative that was hegemonic for many years has been overcome to some extent. A good example of this change is Italy, where we have seen that people are on the side of workers rather than companies. After strikes and demonstrations, tips given to food-delivery workers tend to double.



LISBETH BECH POULSEN

has been a member of the Danish Parliament for the Socialistisk Folkeparti since 2011. She is the party's spokesperson on taxation, financial and economic affairs, and IT and technology.



BARTŁOMIEJ KOZEK

is a journalist at *Zielone Wiadomości* (Green News), a Polish bimonthly web magazine. He was previously secretary general of the Polish Green Party (Zieloni 2004) and an advisor on social issues.



KAROLIEN LENAERTS

works as a research fellow in the Brussels-based CEPS think tank, where she focuses on the future of work and digitalisation, platform economy, education and skills, and social policy.



LORENZO ZAMPONI

is a research fellow in sociology and political science at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Florence. He has conducted extensive research work on the mobilisation of gig economy workers in Italy.

THE LIMITS OF WORK

POVERTY AND EXPLOITATION IN TODAY'S EUROPEAN UNION

ARTICLE BY
**APOLENA
RYCHLÍKOVÁ
& SAŠA UHLOVÁ**

The 2017 documentary *The Limits of Work* (*Hranice práce*) confronts the viewer with the terrible reality of work for many. Investigative journalist Saša Uhlová spends six months working a series of low-paid agency jobs equipped with a camera throughout. Casting a light on the conditions that some endure to keep society ticking on, the release provoked a fresh debate about work in the Czech Republic and received international acclaim.



ver the past few years, more and more people have been telling me about bad working conditions, about not being paid properly, about working too many extra hours, and being mistreated at work. I realised that poorly paid

CS

work and bad working conditions were important topics in the Czech Republic that deserved more coverage and discussion. However, my sources did not want to feature as the heroes of articles. Sometimes they even refused to be quoted anonymously.

This article is available in its original language (Czech) on the Green European Journal website.

**HRANICE PRÁCE:
CHUDOBA A
VYKOŘIŠTĚNÍ
V DNEŠNÍ
EVROPSKÉ UNII**

Saša Uhlová vybavena videokamerou pracovala po dobu šesti měsíců po celém světě v řadě špatně placených, agenturou zprostředkovaných zaměstnání.

It became clear that the only way of uncovering the world of appalling working conditions was to work in it myself. Inspired by Günter Wallraff, Barbara Ehrenreich, Florence Aubenas, and George Orwell, I sought to testify to these conditions without endangering those who work in them to make ends meet.

Our work highlights how there are people employed in very poor conditions, doing jobs that are often physically demanding, yet whose pay is so low they can hardly provide for themselves, let alone their families. We did not have a clear idea of what the result would be. However, we knew the type of jobs we were looking for: jobs we

benefit from every day but that are hugely undervalued in status and pay. We buy food, expect streets to be cleaned, and consumer goods to be produced, but rarely see who provides them or at what price.

We wanted to stimulate a society-wide conversation about how such working conditions can still exist in the 21st-century European Union. The debate on the working poor is not only important for those involved. Pay is low even in skilled professions in the Czech Republic. 80 per cent of employees have a monthly wage of between 400 and 1700 euros and, in 2017, median pay was 900 euros. Up to one million Czech citizens are in danger of becoming working poor. Any unexpected expense, such as a new washing machine, could force them into a debt trap.

During the seven months I spent in low-paid jobs, I was so consumed by work that it did not allow reflection on the impact it was having on me, my family, and my relationships. Nevertheless, I realised that I was losing people close to me and that my children and husband were missing me badly.

I worked in five different positions: a laundry owned by the Czech Republic's largest public hospital, a chicken processing plant owned by oligarch Andrej Babiš (now incumbent and embattled Czech prime minister), a supermarket checkout, a razor factory in

North Bohemia, and a recycling plant in North Moravia. The labour code was violated in four of them. Pay ranged from the then minimum wage of 2.50 to 6 euros per hour. While hospital employees were confronted with pay discrepancies between in-house and agency workers, the chicken plant's main problem was constant overtime that meant you never knew when you could go home. Agency workers often had higher hourly wages, but nobody covered their health and social insurance and they worked 12 or more hours a day. In the supermarket, the biggest issue was the working hours. Some colleagues spent up to 17 hours a day on the till.

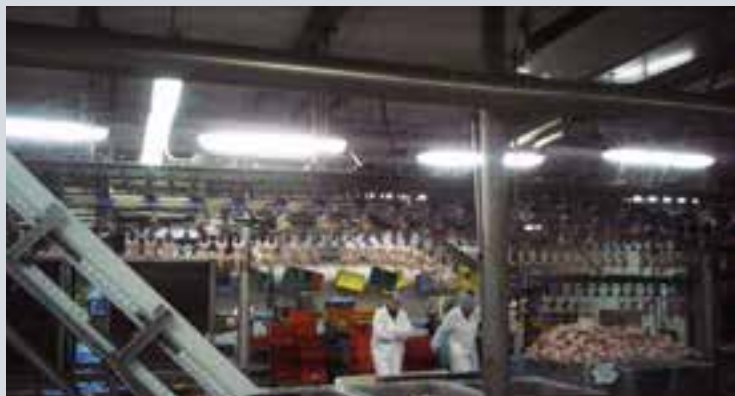
Health and safety training was not given for any of these jobs, and some – such as at the chicken processing and recycling plants – were potentially dangerous. Not providing employees with such training is a violation of the labour code.

A common feature of all these jobs was the lack of respect for employees' time and energy. Management at the recycling plant only provided staff with next week's shift schedule at the end of the week, damaging employees' private lives. At the supermarket, checkout staff were not allowed to leave at agreed times and had to wait to be replaced.



Saša's first job. Public hospital laundry in Prague.

The second job in a firm owned by Prime Minister Babiš. Chicken processing plant in Vodňany, a small city in the south of the Czech Republic.



Saša meets her colleague from the hospital, Marie. They became close friends.



Halfway through the project and depression is coming. Saša is working at the supermarket, lives in Prague but because of working hours she cannot see her family.



Working in a Prague supermarket for 3 euros an hour.



The fourth job in the north of the Czech Republic. Saša is at her friends' place but she is tired. She works 12 hours per day.

A colleague from the razor factory in Krupka, North Bohemia.



It's 5:00 am and Saša is going to work. It's her last job in Ostrava, one of the biggest towns in the country. Shifts at the recycling plant run from 5:30 to 14:00 and she lives in a squat.

Rats, an everyday experience. Saša's boss told her: "Sometimes you can see rats all around there. But don't worry, nobody has caught Weil's disease for three years."





Colleagues taking a smoking break at the chicken plant in Vodňany, the second job.



Saša's best friend from the laundry.



Saša and husband Tomáš having a rare moment together watching TV.

The conditions of people working in low-paid jobs are alarming, but employees in many skilled positions such as education, healthcare, and social services face similar problems. Questions such as automation or 'Industry 4.0' are only dealt with by trade unions – there is no political discussion. Crucial topics such as the future of labour are often pushed aside by the media as well. Organisations representing workers have gained bad reputations – unions are perceived as a 'Bolshevik hangover' taking us back to before 1989. Strikes and protests are mostly covered in a negative light, sometimes even labelled as 'immoral' or with strikers described as 'whinging failures'. These labels have spread to public discourse, reinforcing a reality that makes marginalised people feel unrepresented, forgotten, and lacking the courage to change things.

In the past few years, the union-led 'End of Cheap Labour' campaign has highlighted the problem of poor pay. Our project built on this campaign's success and helped deepen the discussion. It received a surprisingly positive response, both in the media and from people directly affected by precarious, low-paid work.

The articles reached approximately 200 000 people and the documentary was watched 300 000 times, so the project's overall impact is huge. The articles were published before the parliamentary election in October 2017 and became part of political discussions – left-wing politicians referred to them, although not very convincingly. Discussion of marginalisation, labour, low pay, exploitation, and labour code violations has long been lacking in the Czech Republic. No political party has managed to raise these issues properly.

People's dissatisfaction with developments after the 1989 Velvet Revolution, deepening social disparities, and general frustration shaped the election results. In the October 2017 election, anti-system parties scored major successes. These parties purport to stand against the status quo, although in fact they benefit from it. The current (caretaker) Prime

Minister is an oligarch who owns factories where workers are given disgracefully low wages and terrible conditions, who misuses EU subsidies, owns key media, and is one of the country's richest people. Another successful politician is far-right businessman Tomio Okamura, who – despite being part-Japanese – attacks people from other ethnic and national backgrounds and only supports welfare for Czech citizens. Recently, he questioned the existence of a World War Two concentration camp for Romani people, 90 per cent of whom died in the Romani Holocaust. Okamura used a narrative around work to question whether the camp existed. Like former Czech President Václav Klaus, he claims that this facility, where hundreds of men, women, and children died, was actually just a place where “unadaptable” Roma were sent to learn how to work.

Although the Czech Republic has seen economic growth in the last four years, ordinary people can hardly feel it. Wages have increased only modestly, but living costs have grown rapidly. People with low incomes find it difficult to pay market rents and there is no alternative such as social housing, so the number of people depending on housing benefit keeps rising. Ultimately, all of us pay dearly for low wages and expensive housing, as state money is used to contribute to private rents for hundreds of thousands, thus subsidising exploitation. Low incomes are also devastating for families

– children can be taken away from very poor families and placed in state institutions where the costs of raising them are several times higher. There is basically no systematic help for vulnerable families. The situation is even worse for single parents who are four times more prone to poverty than other people. The Czech Republic has very few public nurseries for children aged under three (and the private ones are very expensive), and the average parental allowance is only around 250 euros a month, so single mothers need to quickly return to work. At the jobs Saša worked, there were many mothers who said “I didn’t see my child grow up.”

Education usually fails to help children from poor families escape poverty. As their families typically need another source of income, poorer students opt to attend vocational schools, get their vocational certificate at 17 or 18, and start work immediately, usually for low pay.

Last but not least, the matter of alarmingly low wages is also connected with ethnic and gender discrimination. People of colour are discriminated against in the labour market and it is difficult for them to find reasonably paid work. Women have a lower median income, and many unskilled jobs are gendered. Cleaners, receptionists, and sewing machinists are typically women and the jobs are among the worst paid in the country.

When hundreds of thousands of people are not living in dignified conditions, there are obvious social consequences. When confronted with charts and figures, many people cannot picture the actual stories of the marginalised – working while ill, suffering from fears of eviction or dispossession, or struggling under debts that are impossible to pay off. Disadvantaged in access to good schools and housing, their work, often done by night on an irregular schedule, has a brutal effect on health in the long run. However, our project could not go that far. As Saša mentions in the film: “It would only be real research if I did it for years.” Although we could not go so deep, at least we managed to draw attention to the demeaning, marginalised positions of so many. The huge reach of the project – the hundreds of thousands of people who read the articles, public discussions, full cinemas, tours around the Czech Republic, and dozens of interviews in all the major Czech media outlets and many foreign ones, as well as interest in documentary screenings abroad – shows it made sense.

We can only hope that our project will result in an actual improvement in the situations of those who it features. It was them we had in mind throughout.



APOLENA RYCHLÍKOVÁ

is a documentary filmmaker and a journalist at a2larm.cz. Her latest film, *Czech Journal: The Limits of Work* (2017), won the Czech Joy prize for Best Czech Documentary Film and the Audience Award at the Jihlava International Documentary Film Festival in 2017.



SAŠA UHLOVÁ

is a Czech journalist. Since 2017, she has worked for online magazine a2larm.cz, where she published a series of articles entitled ‘The Heroes of Capitalist Labour’ about her undercover research of working poverty in the Czech Republic.

REPRESENTING THE BRAVE NEW WORLD OF WORK

AN INTERVIEW WITH
REINER HOFFMANN
BY **RODERICK
KEFFERPÜTZ**

Work is changing. Globalisation, new technologies, demographic developments, and cultural change are reshaping the world of work. How are the labour market, our understanding of work, and employees' interests changing? What is trade union politics in the 21st century? What support do employees need for the labour market of the future? And what role does Europe play in all this? We discussed these issues with Reiner Hoffmann, president of the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) – one of the world's largest trade unions.

RODERICK KEFFERPÜTZ: We are in the midst of rapid technological change. Digitalisation is turning the whole world of work upside down. How should this transformation be handled?



This interview is available in its original language (German) on the Green European Journal website.

SCHÖNE NEUE ARBEITSWELT?

Die Arbeit befindet sich im Umbruch und die Arbeitnehmerinteressen individualisieren sich. Die Gewerkschaften müssen diesen Herausforderungen gerecht werden.

REINER HOFFMANN: Digitalisation is a major structural transformation that could bring about a significant reduction in jobs. At the same time, we don't know in which sectors and to what extent new work will be created. Adjusting to technological change will be a process of learning from experience, just as it was with the first, second, and third industrial revolutions.

So the question is whether we manage to put people at the centre of this transformation instead of just being led by what is technically and technologically feasible. If we stick with the technology-led approach, we will lose out. If we are to shape digitalisation from a people-centred perspective, then education and training are key.

Education and training to stay fit for a changing job market?

REINER HOFFMANN: You used to be trained and qualified for one job that would see you through to retirement but that hasn't been true for a long time. Since the 1970s, we have been discussing lifelong learning under the umbrella of the International Labour Organization. Far too little of that has been implemented.

What we are experiencing now is a crazy acceleration. Let's just look at the half-life of technological innovations: innovation cycles that used to take 15-20 years take six or nine months today. This acceleration means the half-life of a basic qualification is also significantly shorter today.

Because of these rapid changes, employees are obliged to constantly review their qualifications and when necessary adapt and update them, so they are constantly having to learn more. This requires completely different forms of lifelong learning from what we were used to. Education is a fundamental right and doesn't end with one's first professional qualification. In view of the pace of innovation today, it has to include continuing education. That's why we're fighting for a fundamental right to continuing education, and for its funding.

Who should pay for this right to continuing education?

REINER HOFFMANN: This is a new distributional conflict. We have a massive need for investment in education. That's a job for society and for business. Germany is rich enough to invest in education if the right people are asked to pay, for example through a fairer tax system. What's also needed are collective bargaining agreements, such as that already made by IG Metall with employers, giving employees rights to, and opportunities for, further training in addition to flexible working.

But not everybody is keen on lifelong learning. There are people who, after 20-30 years at work, do not feel like reinventing themselves.

REINER HOFFMANN: Education should be fun; it's hard to force people to do something. Unfortunately, our education systems aren't set up that way, they inspire neither curiosity nor joy. Many people see education not as an opportunity but as a form of pressure. They're afraid of not being able to keep up and of getting left behind. But that cannot be the motivation sustaining education in the long run. That's why our education system urgently needs to change. It needs to motivate people to keep coming back and keep learning – without them being forced to do so. Because anyone who has to learn, but doesn't want to, won't learn.

What challenges and opportunities does technological change bring for employees?

REINER HOFFMANN: We have to proactively shape this transformation in order to seize the opportunities and minimise the risks. Digitalisation undoubtedly offers numerous advantages. The new technologies can reduce traditional burdens such as dust, noise, and heavy loads. At the same time, however, new burdens arise, such as being constantly accessible, that is, the dissolution of temporal and spatial barriers. Working from home can provide some relief, but emails in the middle of the night are stressful too, of course. The DGB Good Work Index has found in surveys that many people suffer from this erosion of the boundary between work and home life as well as from increasingly intense and tightly-controlled working lives. These are completely new challenges for employees, and also for occupational safety.

The requirements for occupational health and safety regimes must therefore be brought up to date. We have long been calling for an anti-stress regulation that classifies today's stress factors. We need clear rules for work in the digital workplace, from the 'right to disconnect' to the comprehensive recording of working time. Employees must be allowed to decide when to switch off their mobile phones and computers, and they should be paid if they are still checking their emails in the evening.

Along with the digital transformation we are also seeing cultural changes. The way we think of work is in flux. For some, work is a means of earning a living, for others it is their identity and a source of meaning. Is there an emerging divide within the world of work between those who work to live and those who live to work?

REINER HOFFMANN: These changed attitudes are especially noticeable among young people who have completely different expectations from working life. This shift also has something to do with prosperity. People can take advantage of flexible working arrangements provided their material wants are reasonably well satisfied. That's one clear change. Another is that people are more likely to say that they want to focus on their families, or to do more travelling, or to educate themselves – and not just once they reach retirement age.

But with all these changes, one thing remains central: work is the foundation for reproduction, income generation, and social cohesion. Work is more than a means of subsistence. Certainly, that has to be guaranteed, but work also has an integrating function because it ensures one's participation in society. This social function of work explains why I oppose an unconditional basic income, which sidelines, stigmatises, and excludes people.

But the world of work is fragmenting. There are different values, new forms of employment are emerging, and interests diverge evermore. Is work still a relevant platform for political mobilisation? Can a trade union bring these differences together?

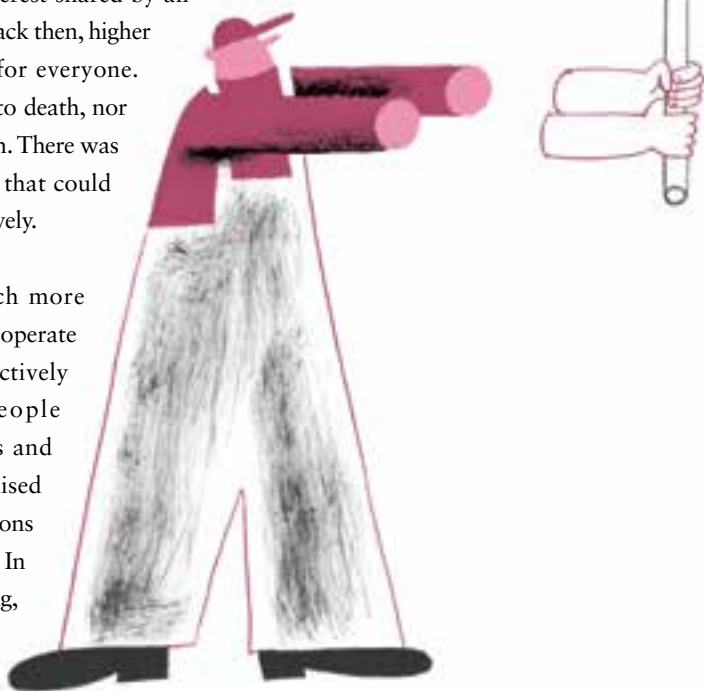
REINER HOFFMANN: As a collective body, we have to. Trade unions are member organisations and as a member organisation we are only able to act if the members act together and in solidarity.

One of the challenges we now face is the increased individualisation and variety of lifestyles. There is no longer one single interest shared by all employees, as in the past. Back then, higher wages were the priority for everyone. Nobody wanted to starve to death, nor to work themselves to death. There was a single collective interest that could also be represented collectively.

Today, interests are much more differentiated. We have to operate constructively and productively with this diversity. People expect individual choices and possibilities, not standardised solutions but diverse solutions for different life situations. In terms of collective bargaining, we have already offered solutions of this kind.

Can you give an example?

REINER HOFFMANN: Following the last collective bargaining round of the Railway and Transport Workers' Union (EVG) in Germany, employees were given a choice. At the second stage of the overall wage rise, each employee could pick between 2.6 per cent more money, six more days of holiday per year, or a shorter working week. 56 per cent opted for more holiday and 42 per cent for the wage increase.



But solutions of this kind are not enough. We need new definitions of the concepts of employee and employer. In the platform economy, with platforms such as Helpling, Uber, or Lieferando, the operators do not see themselves as employers but simply as mediators for services between self-employed workers and their customers. They don't want to take on the responsibilities of employers.

However, it is clear that a driver at Uber is not self-employed. First, a driver cannot decide the fare. If they really were self-employed, then drivers could decide for themselves how much it costs to drive someone from A to B. But he or she can't do that because Uber has full control over pricing. And second, Uber pockets 20 per cent per trip as a fee. So this is a classic employer-employee relationship. But the platform providers of this world simply don't want to know – they pay no taxes, no social security contributions, and do not even offer decent basic wages.

What can be done about it?

REINER HOFFMANN: We are discussing new definitions of employer and employee with the European Commission that will specify who has what rights and obligations. Since platform-based services are offered worldwide, national regulations won't work. The European level is therefore a minimum requirement. In the long run, we really need global rules.

Speaking of the European level, do other European trade unions share your views on the working world of the future? Is there a shared common vision, or are the ideas very different?

REINER HOFFMANN: The European trade unions share many ideas, but their contexts are very different. In the southern European countries, where unemployment rates are much higher than elsewhere, the approach to these topics is completely different. But here, too, we have things in common.

The rapid changes in the world of work through digitalisation and globalisation are starting to break down all kinds of barriers, and people everywhere are feeling increasingly insecure, regardless of their specific national context or conditions. Everywhere, they are asking themselves whether they really have to start a further education course at 60 or whether they will make it to retirement age in their current job. And many are not only thinking about themselves but also about their children and grandchildren and wondering what will be available to them. Many people no longer believe in the promise of prosperity – that one day my children will be better off than me.

This gradual loss of control leads to a crisis of trust in established political institutions. People do not trust them to be able to handle these upheavals. That also means they turn to right-wing populists and their simple solutions.

But protectionism, racism, and exclusion are an additional danger, not a solution. The unions, which stand for cosmopolitanism and anti-racism as principles, have to handle this. Employees want new sources of security, security frameworks they can depend upon for protection at work and in their private lives.

What role can the EU play in building the new security frameworks needed?

REINER HOFFMANN: The European Pillar of Social Rights, for example, could play a central role.¹ For this, we need to do more than just maintain the status quo in terms of the social standards that have prevailed for the last six decades in Europe. We need more and better European standards in the labour market and in social policy. The race to the bottom, on wages, on social achievements, the ever-longer working hours, represent neither an economically nor socially appropriate European response to globalisation and digitalisation. The Pillar of Social Rights offers a big opportunity. This is also thanks to the European Commission. But it is important now that the EU Member States fill this pillar with life. To do this, the European Commission has to push forward with setting European standards in the coming years.

The progressive forces in society, whether political parties or European trade unions, must together lead the fight for a Europe of solidarity. We have to provide answers to these challenges; answers that go far beyond the status quo. The aim must be to shape modernisation, from infrastructure to the European energy transition to 'decent work'.



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¹ The European Pillar of Social Rights is a set of social rights based around 20 principles which the European Commission and its Member States subscribed to work towards in 2017. bit.ly/2HoeFKi

POST-WORK

THE RADICAL IDEA OF A WORLD WITHOUT JOBS

ARTICLE BY
ANDY BECKETT

Work has ruled our lives for centuries, and it does so today more than ever. But a new generation of thinkers insists there is an alternative. Faced with the breakdown of previous certainties around the world of work, ‘post-work’ promises the freedom of a world without it.

Work is the master of the modern world. It dominates and pervades everyday life – especially in Britain and the US – more completely than at any time in recent history. An obsession with employability runs through education. Even severely disabled welfare claimants are required to be work-seekers. Corporate superstars show off their epic work schedules. ‘Hard-working families’ are idealised by politicians. Friends pitch each other business ideas. Tech companies persuade their employees that round-the-clock work is play. Gig economy companies claim that round-the-clock work is freedom. Workers commute further, strike less, retire later. Digital technology lets work invade leisure.

In all these mutually reinforcing ways, work increasingly forms our routines and psyches, and squeezes out other influences. As Joanna Biggs put it in her quietly disturbing 2015 book *All Day Long: A Portrait of Britain at Work*, “Work is ... how we give our lives meaning when religion, party politics and community fall away.”

And yet work is not working, for ever more people, in ever more ways. We resist acknowledging these as more than isolated problems – such is work’s centrality to our belief systems – but the evidence of its failures is all around us.

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that was first published
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in January 2018.

As a source of subsistence, let alone prosperity, work is now insufficient for whole social classes. In the UK, almost two thirds of those in

poverty – around 8 million people – are in working households. In the US, the average wage has stagnated for half a century.

As a source of social mobility and self-worth, work increasingly fails even the most educated people. In 2017, half of recent UK graduates were officially classified as “working in a non-graduate role”. In the US, “belief in work is crumbling among people in their 20s and 30s”, says Benjamin Hunnicutt, a leading historian of work. “They are not looking to their job for satisfaction or social advancement.”

Work is increasingly precarious: more zero-hours or short-term contracts; more self-employed people with erratic incomes; more corporate ‘restructurings’ for those still with actual jobs. As a source of sustainable consumer booms and mass home-ownership – for much of the 20th century, the main successes of mainstream Western economic policy – work is discredited daily by our ongoing debt and housing crises. For many people, not just the very wealthy, work has become less important financially than inheriting money or owning a home.

Whether you look at a screen all day, or sell other underpaid people goods they can’t afford, more and more work feels pointless or even socially damaging – what the American anthropologist David Graeber called “bullshit jobs” in a famous 2013 article. His argument seemed subjective and crude, but economic

data increasingly supports it. The growth of productivity is slowing across the rich world – despite the constant measurement of employee performance and intensification of work routines that makes many jobs barely tolerable.

Unsurprisingly, work is increasingly regarded as bad for your health: “Stress ... an overwhelming ‘to-do’ list ... [and] long hours sitting at a desk,” the Cass Business School professor Peter Fleming notes in his book, *The Death of Homo Economicus*, are beginning to be seen by medical authorities as akin to smoking.

Work is badly distributed. People have too much, or too little, or both in the same month. Away from our unpredictable, all-consuming workplaces, vital human activities are increasingly neglected. Workers lack the time or energy to raise children attentively, or to look after elderly relations. “The crisis of work is also a crisis of home,” declared the social theorists Helen Hester and Nick Srnicek in a paper last year.

Beyond all these dysfunctions, loom the most discussed, most existential threats to work as we know it: automation, and the state of the environment. Some recent estimates suggest that between a third and a half of all jobs could be taken over by artificial intelligence in the next two decades. Other forecasters doubt whether work can be sustained in its current, toxic form on a warming planet.

REKINDLING LOST DREAMS OF LEISURE

Our culture of work strains to cover its flaws by claiming to be unavoidable and natural. “Mankind is hardwired to work,” as the Conservative Member of Parliament Nick Boles puts it in a new book, *Square Deal*. It is an argument most of us have long internalised.

But not quite all. The idea of a world freed from work, wholly or in part, has been intermittently expressed – and mocked and suppressed – for as long as modern capitalism has existed. In 1845, Karl Marx wrote that in a communist society workers would be freed from the monotony of a single draining job to “hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner.” In 1884, the socialist William Morris proposed that in “beautiful” factories of the future, surrounded by gardens for relaxation, employees should work only “four hours a day.”

In 1930, the economist John Maynard Keynes predicted that, by the early 21st century, advances in technology would lead to an “age of leisure and abundance”, in which people might work 15 hours a week. In 1980, as robots began to depopulate factories, the French social and economic theorist André Gorz declared: “The abolition of work is a process already underway ... The manner in which [it] is to be managed ... constitutes the central political issue of the coming decades.”

Since the early 2010s, as the crisis of work has become increasingly unavoidable in the US and the UK, these heretical ideas have been rediscovered and developed further. A new anti-work movement has taken shape. Graeber, Hester, Srnicek, Hunnicutt, Fleming and others are members of a loose, transatlantic network of thinkers who advocate a profoundly different future for Western economies and societies, and also for poorer countries, where the crises of work and the threat posed by robots and climate change are even greater. They call this future ‘post-work’.

For some, this future must include a universal basic income, paid by the state to every working-age person, so that they can survive when the great automation comes. For others, the debate about universal basic income is a distraction from even bigger issues.

Post-work may be a rather grey and academic-sounding phrase, but it offers enormous, alluring promises: that life with much less work, or no work at all, would be calmer, more equal, more communal, more pleasurable, more thoughtful, more politically engaged, more fulfilled – in short, that much of human experience would be transformed.

To many, this will sound outlandish, foolishly optimistic – and quite possibly immoral. But the post-workists insist they are the realists

now. “Either automation or the environment, or both, will force the way society thinks about work to change,” says David Frayne, a radical young Welsh academic.

WORK AS WE KNOW IT

One of post-work’s best arguments is that, contrary to conventional wisdom, the work ideology is neither natural nor very old. “Work as we know it is a recent construct,” says Hunnicutt. Like most historians, he identifies the main building blocks of our work culture as 16th-century Protestantism, which saw effortful labour as leading to a good afterlife; 19th-century industrial capitalism, which required disciplined workers and driven entrepreneurs; and the 20th-century desires for consumer goods and self-fulfillment.

Before the emergence of the modern work ethic, Hunnicutt says, “All cultures thought of work as a means to an end, not an end in itself.” From urban ancient Greece to agrarian societies, work was either something to be outsourced to others – often slaves – or something to be done as quickly as possible so that the rest of life could happen.

Even once the new work ethic was established, working patterns continued to shift and be challenged. Between 1800 and the 1970s, the average working week in the West shrank from about 80 hours to about 40 hours. Trade union pressure, technological change, enlightened employers, and government legislation all progressively eroded the dominance of work.

Sometimes, economic shocks accelerated the process. In Britain in 1974, Edward Heath’s Conservative government, faced with a chronic energy shortage caused by an international oil crisis and a miners’ strike, imposed a national three-day working week. For the two months it lasted, people’s non-work lives expanded. Golf courses were busier, and fishing-tackle shops reported large sales increases.

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The economic consequences were mixed. Most people's earnings fell. Working days became longer. Yet a national survey of companies found that productivity improved by about 5 per cent: a huge increase by Britain's usual sluggish standards. "Thinking was stimulated" inside government and business, the consultants noted, "on the possibility of arranging a permanent four-day week." Nothing came of it. But during the 1960s and 1970s, ideas about redefining work, or escaping it altogether, were commonplace in Europe – from corporate retreats to the counterculture to academia, where a new discipline was established: leisure studies, the study of recreations such as sport and travel.

By the end of the 1970s, it was possible to believe that the supremacy of work might be coming to an end in the more comfortable parts of the West. Labour-saving computer technologies were becoming widely available for the first time. Frequent strikes provided highly public examples of work routines being interrupted and challenged. Crucially, wages were high enough, for most people, to make working less a practical possibility.

Instead, work ideology was reimposed. During the 1980s, the aggressively pro-business governments of Margaret Thatcher

and Ronald Reagan strengthened the power of employers, and used welfare cuts and moralistic rhetoric to create a much harsher environment for people without jobs. David

Graeber argues that these policies were motivated by a desire for social control. After the political turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s, he says, "Conservatives freaked out at the prospect of

everyone becoming hippies and abandoning work. They thought: 'What will become of the social order?'"

Outside the intense working cultures of Britain and the US, the reduction of work has long been a mainstream notion. In France in 2000, Lionel Jospin's left-wing coalition government introduced a maximum 35-hour week for all employees, partly to reduce unemployment and promote gender equality, under the slogan, "Work less – live more." The law was not absolute (some overtime was permitted) and has been weakened since, but many employers have opted to keep a 35-hour week. In Germany, the largest trade union, IG Metall, which represents electrical and metal workers, has recently won its members the right to opt for a 28-hour week.

Defenders of the work culture such as business leaders and mainstream politicians habitually

CONTRARY TO
CONVENTIONAL WISDOM,
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question whether pent-up modern workers have the ability to enjoy, or even survive, the open vistas of time and freedom that post-work thinkers envisage for them. In 1989, two University of Chicago psychologists, Judith LeFevre and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, conducted an experiment that seemed to support this view. They recruited 78 people with jobs at local companies and gave them electronic pagers. For a week, at frequent but random intervals, these employees were contacted and asked to fill in questionnaires about what they were doing and how they were feeling.

The experiment found that people reported “many more positive feelings at work than in leisure.” At work, they were regularly in a state the psychologists called “flow” – “enjoying the moment” by using their knowledge and abilities to the full, while also “learning new skills and increasing self-esteem.” Away from work, “flow” rarely occurred. The employees mainly chose “to watch TV, try to sleep, [and] in general vegetate, even though they [did] not enjoy doing these things.” US workers, the psychologists concluded, had an “inability to organise [their] psychic energy in unstructured free time.”

To the post-workists, such findings are simply a sign of how unhealthy the work culture has become. Our ability to do anything else, only exercised in short bursts, is like a muscle that has atrophied.

A FUTURE CLOSER THAN WE THINK

Will today’s post-workists succeed where all their other predecessors did not? In Britain, possibly the sharpest critic of the movement is Frederick Harry Pitts, a lecturer at Bristol University. Pitts used to be a post-workist himself. He is young and left-wing, and before academia he worked in call centres: he knows how awful a lot of modern work is. Yet Pitts is suspicious of how closely the life post-workists envisage – creative, collaborative, high-minded – resembles the life they already live. “There is little wonder the uptake for post-work thinking has been so strong among journalists and academics”, he wrote in a paper co-authored last year with Ana Dinerstein of Bath University, “since for these groups the alternatives [to traditional work] require little adaptation.”

Pitts argues that post-work’s optimistic visions can be a way of avoiding questions about power. “A post-work society is meant to resolve conflicts between different economic interest groups – that’s part of its appeal,” he told me. Tired of the never-ending task of making work better, some socialists have latched on to post-work, he argues, in the naive hope that exploitation can be ended by getting rid of work altogether.

Hunnicut, the historian of work, sees the US as more resistant than other countries to

post-work ideas. When he argued in 2014 for shorter working hours, he received “personal attacks by email and telephone – that I was some sort of communist and devil-worshipper.” Yet he senses weakness behind such strenuous efforts to shut the work conversation down. “The role of work has changed profoundly before. It’s going to change again. The millennial generation know that the Prince Charming job, that will meet all your needs, has gone.”

As Frayne points out, “in some ways, we’re already in a post-work society. But it’s a dystopic one.” Office employees constantly interrupting their long days with online distractions; gig-economy workers whose labour plays no part in their identity; and all the people in depressed, post-industrial places who have quietly given up trying to earn – the spectre of post-work runs through the hard, shiny culture of modern work like hidden rust.

In October 2017, research conducted by Sheffield Hallam University revealed that UK unemployment is three times higher than the official count of those claiming the dole. When Frayne is not talking and writing about post-work, he sometimes makes a living collecting social data for the Welsh government in former mining towns. “There is lots of worklessness,” he says, “but with no social policies to dignify it.”

Creating a more benign post-work world will be more difficult now than it would have been in the 1970s. In today’s lower-wage economy, suggesting people do less work for less pay is a hard sell. As with free-market capitalism in general, the worse work gets, the harder it is to imagine actually escaping it, so enormous are the steps required.

But for those who think work will just carry on as it is, there is a warning from history. On May 1, 1979, one of the greatest champions of the modern work culture, Margaret Thatcher, made her final campaign speech before being elected prime minister. She reflected on the nature of change in politics and society. “The heresies of one period,” she said, always become “the orthodoxies of the next”. The end of work as we know it will seem unthinkable – until it has happened.



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INVISIBLE BUT INDISPENSABLE

UNPAID WORK AT THE HEART OF OUR ECONOMIES

“Can’t afford to pay your housekeeper anymore? Marry her! Then she’ll do it for free.” So goes an old economics joke. Economic and political analyses have long neglected the reality that serves as the punchline of this joke: throughout history, unpaid, socially useful and invisible forms of work – most often carried out by women relegated to domestic and care work – form part of the backbone of what keeps our society functioning.

Although men increasingly take on some domestic and care work, the balance is still tremendously skewed and we see women taking on waged work while retaining most – if not all – of the domestic and caring responsibilities. When both paid and unpaid work such as household chores and childcare are taken into account, women work an average of 30 minutes a day longer than men in developed countries and 50 minutes longer in developing countries.¹ While this gap may not seem huge, the fact that the vast majority of men’s working hours are paid, whilst a very significant number of women’s working hours are not, is crucial. Among the many resulting inequalities stemming from less paid work for women is a serious discrepancy in pensions. For example, in 2014, European women received pensions 40.2 per cent lower than those of men, despite working more.²

Bobby Kennedy was right in 1968 when he declared that GDP measures “everything except that which is worthwhile.” The Western economic model – focused around GDP and growth – fails to recognise the unpaid work without which it would collapse. As scholars have argued, the post-war period of the so-called ‘golden age’ of Fordism

1 United Nations (2015). Work. *The World’s Women 2015. Trends and Statistics*. bit.ly/2qOokZf

2 Martina Prpic (March 2017). Maternity, paternity and parental leave in the EU. European Parliamentary Research Service. bit.ly/2K0SAc3

– plentiful full-time jobs, suburban housing, and extensive social welfare – was dependent not only on women's unpaid labour but also on the resources and the cheap labour of the rest of the world. This idea has apparently yet to permeate progressive politics.

How can we move forward in Europe when so much of the work that has sustained society is barely recognised and greatly undervalued? The European Union may consider itself one of the most progressive parts of the world when it comes to rectifying gender inequality, yet for the millions of Europeans performing unpaid care and domestic work – work that the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals call for states to recognise – this satisfaction rings false. Greens have long been advocates of recognising this type of work, moving beyond the limitations of GDP, and re-orientating our economy around a different idea of growth.

The political debate on work cannot afford to ignore these questions any longer. Greens need to lead the way in placing unpaid, socially useful and often invisible work firmly in its rightful place at the centre of discussions around the future of work. The *Green European Journal* asked politicians and experts from five countries around Europe – Spain, Croatia, Belgium, Finland, and Austria – about how this issue plays out in their country, which policies are already in place, and how deepening our understanding can help us create a more equal future.

SPAIN

ROSA MARTÍNEZ RODRÍGUEZ

GREEN EUROPEAN JOURNAL: What is the place of unpaid domestic work in Spain?

ROSA MARTÍNEZ: Women are the main providers of care work and domestic work, even when they are in paid employment. Even those with a job do almost double the hours of care work that men do. Women take 92 per cent of unpaid leave in Spain to look after relatives; they are the ones who stop working to look after their families. Unpaid care work is equivalent to 45 per cent of Spain's GDP. If the system had to pay for this work, it would collapse.

What practical steps should politicians and progressives take to include this issue in the 'future of work' discussion?

ROSA MARTÍNEZ: It's important to talk about sharing the responsibility for this type of work – not only with men but among the whole of society. Here in Spain, we need to invest in public and social services, especially education and health. In 2006, Spain passed the dependents' law which gave people financial support to pay for their daily care, whether provided by a professional carer or family member. Individuals caring for their father, mother, or disabled children were able to be paid by social security. It created many jobs, recognising and professionalising that which

many women were doing for free within their families. However, with the austerity imposed by Spain's right-wing government, led by the Partido Popular, this measure was cut and Spain has seen a 'crisis of care'. As a result, more than 160 000 people caring for elderly or disabled relatives stopped receiving money from social security. One study suggests that keeping the law in place could have produced more than 600 000 jobs between 2010 and 2015.³

A first step would be to restore that law. Another would be to introduce free nursery care for children up to three years of age – it does exist but finding a place is a game of chance.

Another big question is how much of this work is done by migrant women. A walk through Spain's parks reveals many women from South America looking after children. This is the 'global care chain', in which women leave their own families to look after other people's children in Europe, often in a precarious situation, with bad pay and no papers. We need good regulation to protect them.

How do you see that relating to your own experience – as a mother and a politician?

ROSAL MARTÍNEZ: I travel to the parliament in Madrid every week, leaving my children with

their father, and it gives me a feeling of guilt. Women have been told that our role in life is to be a good mother and that this means spending a lot of time at home. Men don't face the same expectation. This issue is at once personal and political. It's not just me; all women with children who want a professional career have to face this expectation and prejudice.

Women between 30 and 45 are missing from politics because they are raising their children.⁴ The most prominent European female politicians have no children – it seems that women still have to make a choice that men don't.

How has austerity affected the situation?

ROSAL MARTÍNEZ: When governments withdraw social support, it is mostly women who are forced to step in and replace that service, often to the detriment of their own pensions, careers, time, and health. During the crisis, grandparents, especially grandmothers, kept families going, helping their unemployed children, cooking, and looking after their grandchildren. And there is no retirement; most women worked both inside and outside the home but only retire from the work outside the home. The resulting pay gap has important consequences, because if you stop working or you work part-time, as many women in Spain do, your pension is then lower.

³ Maryem Castillo (Sept. 2012). La Ley de Dependencia puede generar más de 600.000 empleos. *El País*. bit.ly/2vuHhpi

⁴ Campbell, R. & Childs, S. (Jan. 2014). This Ludicrous Obsession, Parents in Parliament: The Motherhood Trap. *Huffington Post*. bit.ly/2qLmRDE

CROATIA **MARIJA ČAČIĆ**

According to translator and activist Marija Čačić, Croatia's particular history has led to structures that, combined with cultural beliefs, produce serious inequality, with "almost 50 per cent of Croatians agreeing that a woman's main concern is her husband, children, and home."⁵

Post-Yugoslavian 'reforms' to healthcare systems, labour regulations, and pensions – imposed as conditions for EU accession or by the IMF and the World Bank – have had a particularly nefarious effect on women. "Since the scope of social services was lowered, overall women have a lower economic activity because of a larger burden of elder care and child care", she explains. As in other countries, 80 per cent of households have women doing all or almost all of the housework, and their pensions are much lower, leaving them at a higher risk of poverty.⁶ Poor reproductive healthcare services hit women's pockets: "women's health has been largely privatised and unavailable to women who are unemployed, poor, or live in rural areas. In bigger cities, a shortage of gynaecologists with contracts with the Croatian Health Insurance Institute means it's become normal to pay out of pocket for services usually covered by insurance."

Čačić adds that, "When it came to the widespread loss of jobs because of state-owned factories being privatised, as well as cuts in the public sector, women were usually the first to leave, since they could retire earlier than men." A 2014 Labour Act also made it easier to dismiss young mothers and pregnant women.

Recent measures haven't been successful. The so-called 'Law on Nannies' in 2013, which attempted to regulate black market childcare (about 10 000 women work illegally as nannies), only saw 23 women register.⁷ The 'Cash Grants for Parent Caregivers' scheme in Zagreb only led to further economic inactivity from women, according to experts, and did not remedy the lack of kindergartens.

Talking about care work in Croatia brings an international aspect into play. Many Croatian women leave to be carers in Western Europe, especially Austria, where the elderly care model means that they spend half their time working there and the other half in Croatia with their family. Yet "whilst their pay is better than here, it's still very low for such physically and emotionally hard work", she explains.

5 Zeljka Kamenov & Branka Galic (2011). Rodna ravnopravnost i diskriminacija u Hrvatskoj. bit.ly/2HUffGt

6 Ksenija Klasnić (2017). bit.ly/2K6lDDe

7 Zakon o dadiljama. *Zakon.br*. bit.ly/2HoWFFc

BELGIUM ELISE DERMINE

GREEN EUROPEAN JOURNAL: How does Belgian law support types of work that aren't strictly traditional wage employment?

ELISE DERMINE: Although its main aim is to promote economic growth and waged employment on the labour market, Belgian labour law and social security law do also value and reward other types of work. Jobs in the non-profit sector are subsidised. Reduced social contributions for certain groups of unemployed people will bring into the purview of wage employment some socially useful activities that would not exist if left to the free interplay of labour and demand on the market. These types of activities in the cultural sector, in the healthcare sector, or in the social sector are not necessarily productive in the economic sense but are valued by society as a whole, which pays to ensure that they keep developing.

It's the same in the public sector: workers can do socially useful activities and be remunerated by the state, and thus reconcile their work life and private life. Belgian workers can take various types of leave to temporarily stop or go part-time without losing their job in order to look after a newborn or an ill relative, or to take some training. Often, during this leave, they receive financial support from the state. You can also take leave in case of taking political office, and to be a 'lay judge'.

How about for those who are not in work?

ELISE DERMINE: In terms of social security, unemployment benefits are dependent on job seekers actively looking for a job and being available on the market – so in a sense our social rights are geared towards putting people into employment. However, you can sometimes keep receiving these benefits whilst not actively looking for a job if you are starting studies, undergoing trainings, looking after your family, or doing voluntary work. You can also do artistic work that is (low) paid – this shows the state wants to support the development of cultural activity and understands that it's difficult to make a living as an artist.

But this system is not very developed, and since the late 1990s, politicians, encouraged by the EU, are leaning towards reducing this type of mechanism and re-orienting policies towards putting people back in work. The argument is that we need people in work to keep financing the welfare state, but the fact that we are returning to a stricter vision of what 'work' means, centred on productivity, doesn't fit with the reality that it's increasingly difficult to create new jobs.

Would a universal basic income help support these types of non-traditional employment?

ELISE DERMINE: Instead of giving everyone a basic income and renouncing the 'right to work', we should expand the idea of 'work' so

that people still have the right to work because this right also includes the idea of participating in society in a socially useful way and to be able – according to your current needs – to leave or come back to paid employment. What should change is that social rights shouldn't only recognise wage employment but enlarge the mechanisms that value other types of socially useful activities.

The danger of a basic income is creating a divide between those with a salary and those who are completely left behind without any mechanisms to get a job or participate in society. We risk confining women to the private sphere, for example.

FINLAND TARU ANTTONEN

Whilst Finland is often regarded as one of the best countries for women, things are far from equal. “When it comes to unpaid work in the home, and care for elderly relatives, women do most of it, even if they are in paid employment. That’s been pretty stable for decades”, explains Taru Anttonen, researcher for Green think tank, Visio. Women take 90.5 per cent of parental leave.⁸ They are legally allowed four months and men nine weeks of paid parental leave, which is non-transferable (cannot be passed on to their spouse). And whilst most women take most of theirs, men

on average take slightly less than four weeks of their leave, and one fifth of men take none of it. The additional six months, which the parents can share out how they want, is also mostly taken by the mother. Women also mostly take the child allowance for staying at home and raising a child until their third birthday.

Many workplaces are not supportive of men’s parental leave. Most don’t hire a cover worker and assume it will be short. Of course, as men earn more than women, financial reasons also push mums to take the leave rather than their partners, as parental allowances are always lower than one’s income. “At the core of this debate”, argues Anttonen, “is the cultural idea that the role of ‘caring’ is strongly female.”

“As Greens, we should be encouraging dads to be part of this caring, and workplaces to support them, because there are so many benefits – they would experience what it can give them, they would challenge stereotypes of men not being caring, and women would have more work opportunities”, reasons Anttonen. Evidence shows that cultural perceptions of what men and women should do start as early as pre-school. “We should have gender-sensitive early education that gives children multiple choices and doesn’t guide them towards certain things, games, or behaviours according to their gender.”

⁸ Martina Prpic (March 2017). Maternity, paternity and parental leave in the EU. European Parliamentary Research Service. bit.ly/2K0SAc3

Whilst parental leave recently looked as if it was about to be equalised for men and women by the current government, internal disagreements between the ruling parties prevented any change. The current system means women can end up out of the labour market for 10 years, or more if they have more children, which jeopardises their career and leads to lower pensions.

Even when it is paid, the work of caring for others is very gendered and poorly remunerated. Jobs that are seen as ‘women’s work’ and that many women still do unpaid for their families – such as caring and cleaning – are some of the lowest paid, which also makes staying home more tempting for women. As Anttonen points out, “Male-dominated jobs such as construction, which require the same level, if not a lower level, of qualification are much better paid than the equivalent female-dominated professions.”

The jobs women have traditionally been limited to throughout history are either unpaid or low paid, suggesting that women’s labour and time is less highly valued than men’s. It is interesting to note that the only job done both inside and outside the home that is frequently highly paid is the male-dominated profession of chef, which even then has a significant gender pay gap of 28.3 per cent.⁹

AUSTRIA BIRGIT MEINHARD

GREEN EUROPEAN JOURNAL: What is the situation of family carers in Austria?

BIRGIT MEINHARD: I focus on what we call ‘care in secret’: the care work done by hundreds of thousands of family and child carers that is effectively invisible in society. In Austria, carers’ lives are often precarious, and though they do receive information about possible support, it is poorly understood and under-used.

Women make up 80 per cent of the 460 000 people receiving care allowances. The 30 per cent who are in paid work find that this care work, with its unpredictable hours, stress levels, and complexity, conflicts with their own professional activity. They are often forced to stop temporarily due to emergencies without knowing how long for – and may have to go part-time, or leave their jobs entirely.

Full or part-time care leave may not be sufficient for the entire care and support they have to provide. Those not in paid work, such as retired women, often come under great mental, physical, and financial strain. Carers are thus often thrust into precarious situations, both whilst they are still in employment and when they retire, and often find themselves

⁹ Andrew Chamberlain (Mar. 2016). Demystifying the Gender Pay Gap. Glassdoor. bit.ly/2KhgxvU

facing poverty – or near poverty – due to a reduced pension and the financial effect of this care work.

What's the effect on the economy?

BIRGIT MEINHARD: 80 per cent of people in need of care are looked after at home. The value of private care in Austria is 3 billion euros per year. These people save the government a huge amount of money – they should be supported.

As a Green politician yourself, what sort of changes do you think are necessary?

BIRGIT MEINHARD: Austria is currently dominated by political tendencies that want women out of the labour market and in the kitchen. Greens are fighting for recognition and change: the long-term care allowance must be adjusted for inflation every year; care and support work should be recognised as a duty of the state and supported through tax revenues; and care and part-time leave must be made a legal entitlement. The range of support options for those who need care must include everyday relief that is adapted to individual needs, rather than the current two extremes of either the short-term mobile service or 24-hour support. I and other Green city councillors have, with the support of other parties, submitted an initiative about child carers who, according to a study by the Ministry of Social Affairs, number at least 42 700. ■



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QUESTIONING THE CENTRALITY OF WORK WITH ANDRÉ GORZ

ARTICLE BY
FRANÇOISE GOLLAIN

André Gorz, a key thinker of political ecology, owes his popularity in part to his radical critique of work. His exhortation to “exit from work”, though undoubtedly utopian, provides us with the opportunity to reflect on what we mean by ‘work’ and on the dominant place we afford it.

As we have always had to engage with our environment to produce what we need to survive, work is often understood as the essence of humanity, something that has existed throughout time and all around the world. However, to grasp the current transformations of work and envisage its future, it is better to understand work in its modern sense, as Gorz invited us to do.



THE INVENTION OF WORK AND THE DOMINATION OF ECONOMIC RATIONALITY

This article is available in its original language (French) on the Green European Journal website.

INTERROGER LA CENTRALITÉ DU TRAVAIL AVEC ANDRÉ GORZ

André Gorz a été un des pionniers de l'écologie politique et de l'analyse du travail dans nos sociétés occidentales. Sa pensée est d'une portée politique et sociale très actuelle.

In the scheme of human history, our Western societies have been based on work for a relatively short span of time. Our primary needs were previously met by self-sufficient production in the context of the family and the village community, which was not assigned economic value, nor was it exchanged. In the seminal *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber argues that, up until the end of the 19th century, the work that went into material production largely continued to follow the customs of the domestic economy. Work was not simply a way to earn a living but rather an inseparable part of a full-fledged way of life governed by traditions that defied economic rationality. The peasant of pre-capitalist cultures, the artisan, the domestic worker – all those who ensured their own subsistence with their own means of production were in a position to regulate the intensity and duration of their work in accordance with their needs. Yet, with the development of capitalism, the

direct link between production and consumption has been eroded. We have lost control over both and have become waged worker-consumers. Exposed to the powerful advertising strategies that fuel our never-ending spiral of needs and desires, we – the majority of us at least – depend fundamentally on our wages.

As market production and consumption gained importance, tasks carried out in the public space came to be increasingly regarded as services that could be measured and remunerated, since they had acquired an exchange value. This marked the birth of work in general, or of what Marx described as “abstract labour”. Capitalism thus ‘invented’ work in the modern sense of ‘employment’ by separating it from the sphere of life in which human activities and relations are subject neither to productivist values nor to the rules of commercial exchange. This waged work (wage labour) must be distinguished from work in the anthropological or philosophical sense, the kind ‘done’ in an almost infinite variety of different forms and professions and which involves toil and/or creating. Waged work – the same work that has suffered, to varying degrees among European countries, a so-called ‘unemployment crisis’ for over 40 years – is well and truly a social construction. It is not the nature of a task that makes it work, or a “heteronomous” activity as Gorz would describe it, but its inclusion in the commercial sphere. Whether the activity of cooking, for instance, is work or not hinges on

whether it is performed in return for payment. With the extension of market rationality, an ever-increasing number of occupations has become considered as work.

NOT EVERYTHING IS WORK

Gorz did not neglect the question of working conditions. On the contrary, he believed that working conditions should be improved to establish a better equilibrium between work and leisure or, more precisely, between employment and work not for economic ends, in order to allow each of us greater space for self-determination.

People everywhere experience the need to make their mark on the world surrounding them and to realise themselves within it. Nevertheless, while this anthropological dimension of work is never totally absent from employment, it remains subordinate to the irreducible ‘heteronomy’ that Gorz understood to be the economic imperative of profit for the employer, and wages for the employee. Personal gratifications such as interest or pleasure, which the worker might derive from their activity, are merely secondary; the primary goal is to earn a living. Above all, any autonomy in work must not be confused with a broader, ‘existential’ autonomy, the defence of which has constituted the fundamental driving force of Gorz’s political ecology for the past 50 years. The promotion of a genuine

autonomy implies calling into question the alarming expansion of the commercial sphere to the detriment of the non-commercial sphere. Gorz observed how the rising efficiency of production creates savings in working time on a society-wide scale. From the outset, this efficiency was unfortunately considered an opportunity for greater production of commercial wealth due to a growth mantra that pushes the expansion of economic rationality into areas which should not be subject to it.

For example, in our industrialised societies, all that remains of domestic production are the activities necessary for the maintenance of everyday life. As a result of the mass outsourcing of domestic tasks, the rest are now regarded as commercial and industrial activities. Sustaining this movement involves absorbing greater and greater amounts of people and time into commercial services in degraded forms of employment. Our era's reduction in the volume of work is thus 'managed' with the tacit acceptance of a sharpening of inequalities in status and standards of living. The numerous fast-food delivery drivers, cleaning and home-help staff, and so on, form a mass of underpaid service providers, often at the disposal of those overwhelmed by better-paid work. Yet this outsourcing would only make sense if it freed up time on a society-wide scale. An economy based on the extreme development of the mutual exchange of services would be completely irrational.

This terrifying trend of transforming into employment, and thereby monetising, activities that were previously cost-free and autonomous is precisely what spurred Gorz to write the *Critique of Economic Reason* in 1989. In his view, the staggering expansion in personal services undermines our capacity to take care of ourselves, weakening our existential autonomy, along with the social fabric that sustains us. This model actually runs counter to the deeply-rooted needs of individuals to assert control over their own bodies and spaces, in the form of 'work for oneself' (childcare, cooking, walking the dog, cleaning, etc.), just as over the familiar, informal, and common space of the village or neighbourhood. In terms of people's many real and neglected needs, such as care for dependants, these should be systematically covered either by services financed from public funds (rather than by commercial services), or taken care of by people themselves, according to various arrangements for mutual assistance. Gorz thus advocated a system based on two pillars working together, one consisting of institutionalised systems and the other of self-organised cooperative and voluntary systems.

A SOCIETY OF PHANTOM WORK

Let us return to wage labour in general. With the globalisation and the intensified division of labour that it entails, work in the form of employment is incontestably becoming increasingly prevalent across the globe. It applies to rising numbers of human activities

and is compulsory activity for most people to survive. However, the rise in the number of paid jobs, along with the ascent of a middle class in emerging economies, should not lead us to overlook the trauma experienced by large portions of populations affected first by deruralisation and, subsequently, proletarianisation accompanied by degraded forms of urbanisation. The structural character

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of a global unemployment rate that has stood at between 5.5 and 6 per cent for over a decade cannot be ignored¹, nor can the significant proportion of jobs described euphemistically as ‘vulnerable’. Even while controversy rages over the impact of digital technology on work, there is good reason to question the employment model as a form of social organisation.

For European workers, work is also becoming ever more inescapable as daily life is rationalised along its logic. Paradoxically, as jobs require greater personal investment while paid working time falls, time spent actually working often increases. Digital technology, for example, allows one to be consulted and to work outside of the office. Moreover, work remains a provider of rights and of status, as well as a source of identity and integration.

We continue to live in a culture of work. However, employment is gradually losing its statutory protections and is marked by precariousness and increasing discontinuity,

to such an extent that its position as the point around which to anchor one’s existence is declining rapidly. Employment fulfils with ever-greater difficulty its structural functions, identified by a renowned study dating from 1930 on

the unemployed of Marienthal in Austria by the team of sociologist Marie Jahoda. These include a shared experience and objective, structured time, and a regular activity. Gorz expressed this lyrically in *Reclaiming Work: Beyond the Wage-Based Society* (1999): “Work now retains merely a phantom centrality: phantom in the sense of a phantom limb from which an amputee might continue to feel pain. We are a society of phantom work, spectrally surviving the extinction of that work by virtue of the obsessive, reactive invocations of those who continue to see work-based society as the only possible society and who can imagine no other future than a return to the past.”

Current trends – both global and European – show how exhausted this employment model has become and call for a paradigm shift.

1 ILO (January 2018). Unemployment and Decent Work Deficits to Remain High in 2018. bit.ly/2GN4Y1h

As such, it not only must but can be transcended. Let us insist further on this last point: the greatest source of social identity today remains paid employment, rather than work in the anthropological meaning. In other words, social integration is not contingent upon paid employment, which currently fulfils this function as it is the historically determined form of integration in our society. Let us not fool ourselves that it is the inevitable bearer

of these functions of individual and collective identification and expression. At present, the central place of work in our lives functions as a strategy of domination: the injunction to treat oneself as a commodity in search of a buyer. In this context, it would be logical to facilitate identification and expression in alternative, less prescribed, activities of daily life.

Criticising the growth mantra, questioning employment as a model of social organisation, promoting the flourishing of individuals through the development of self-determined activities, demanding a reduction in time spent on heteronomous work – all of these imperatives are inextricably linked. While the atomised individuals of modern cities, short on time, space, and other resources, are increasingly supported by the State and the market – and

often request such support themselves – ‘civil society’, understood as the social fabric of relations of cooperation and mutual assistance voluntarily established independently

of institutional mediation, breaks down. Yet autonomy is not only a private need but also a collective goal: that of producing communities in which the social relations are not predominantly commercial in nature.

THE AT-ALL-COSTS DEFENCE
OF THE IDEOLOGY OF
EMPLOYMENT FOR
EMPLOYMENT'S SAKE AND
OF THE WORK ETHIC IS THE
RESULT OF AN EMINENTLY
POLITICAL CHOICE

FOR A REAL POLITICS OF TIME

Against this phantom-like centrality of work, Gorz's response, advocated first and foremost at a European level, to the need to establish limits to the commercialisation of the world, consisted of a three-fold demand: a guaranteed income for all, decoupled from employment or, in Gorz's terms, an ‘income for living’; deliberate policies to reduce working time; and measures to extend and expand spaces for autonomous, non-commercial activities. Today's resurgence of debates on the introduction of a guaranteed income is welcome, but approaching it in isolation from other policies – social, urban, educational – does not guarantee by any means that it represents an emancipatory solution. While the proposals for the creation of ‘green jobs’ (restoring nature and social cohesion and

responding to needs rather than commercial imperatives) are evidently to be hailed, there remains the need for a genuine politics of time that does not confine itself to reducing unemployment. Most importantly, the at-all-costs defence of the ideology of employment for employment's sake and of the work ethic is the result of an eminently political choice. Politics, however, should go beyond the politics of jobs and employment.

In the wake of May 1968, attempts were made to 'change life' with the support of a trade union movement liberated from its total identification with the world of work, as the French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT) union was in the 1970s – an impulse subsequently crushed by 40 years of neoliberalism and 'crisis'. At a time when work weighs increasingly heavily on existence, the writings of Gorz remain precious. They urge us to think differently about the function and meaning of work and, more broadly, to 'de-economise' the way we think. This will present a considerable challenge as the labour movement has undertaken a critique of capitalism from the perspective of work, its intellectuals and activists having been largely absorbed by the cult of production and of work. Gorz, on the other hand, invited us to promote a society of liberated time, a '*Kulturgesellschaft*' ('society of culture') as

it was called by the German Left, highly advanced on these questions in the 1990s, in opposition to our 'society of work' or '*Arbeitsgesellschaft*'.

Today, however, with some young British academics taking up the watchword autonomy and, more generally with the post-work debate,² we are witnessing the stirrings of a critical discussion that aims to rouse the Left from its slumber on the work issue. If this process of questioning has managed to take hold in the United Kingdom and across the Atlantic (where economic and social policies are not renowned for their progressive character), then there is no reason to despair of the rest of Europe. In this context, Greens have a clear mission: to set out pioneering proposals that break with the consensus.



FRANÇOISE GOLLAIN

has a PhD in Sociology and is an associate lecturer at the Open University in the United Kingdom. She has recently published *André Gorz, une Philosophie de l'Émancipation* (L'Harmattan, 2018).

2 See Beckett, p. 44

WHEN TIME ISN'T MONEY

THE CASE FOR WORKING TIME REDUCTION

AN INTERVIEW WITH
ANNA COOTE
BY **AURÉLIE MARÉCHAL**

In the world as we know it, work is the boss of time. The lives of all, from the overworked to the unemployed, are dictated by work, or lack thereof. Though some may protest, reducing working hours will be an integral part of shifting to a fairer, healthier, and more sustainable society. Analyst and working-time expert Anna Coote explains why the time for change is ripe.

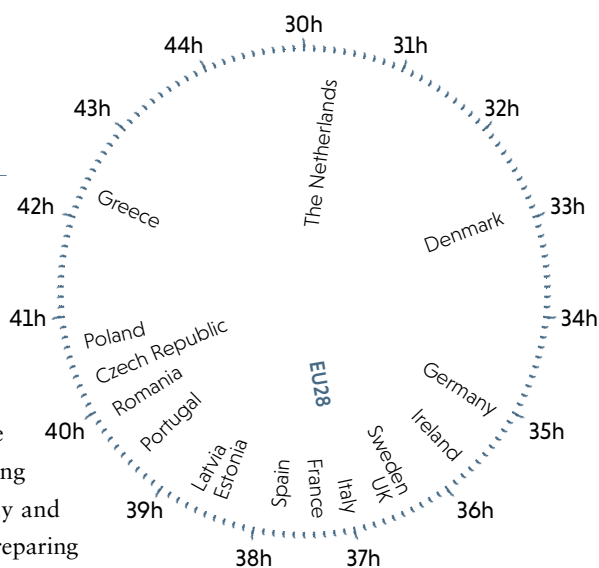
AURÉLIE MARÉCHAL: You advocate, like many others, for a reduction of working time, whether through a 30-hour week, longer holidays or other working-time arrangements. Could you summarise the main reasons for this proposal?

ANNA COOTE: Three main categories of reasons for a shorter working week are the distribution of paid work, the redistribution of unpaid work, and more time to live sustainably. We anticipate there being less paid work in the future, partly because of automation and partly because of the need to change the way the economy works so that it is not simply driven by growth. Exponential growth is not compatible with meeting carbon reduction targets and is not good for the planet, both because of emissions and because of material surplus. It is in the interest of social justice to distribute the work that is available more evenly across the population.

The second reason is the redistribution of unpaid work, such as childcare and domestic responsibilities. At the moment, there are huge inequalities in the amount of disposable time that people have, particularly between men and women. Women have very little disposable time, often due to caring responsibilities for children or elderly relatives. It's important to release men from the imperative to work long hours so that they can share the unpaid work with women more equally.

Average number of working hours per week in 2016

SOURCE: Eurostat [lfsa_ewhun2] – all jobs, sexes, professional statuses, full-time/part-time and economic activities



The third reason is because if people have more disposable time, they may be able to live more sustainably. Sometimes doing things that are sustainable takes more time: repairing things instead of throwing them away and buying new ones, and growing and preparing food rather than buying heavily processed ready meals. In addition, in many cases we buy energy-intensive things because we are busy, due to our lack of time: airline tickets, convenience foods, travelling by car instead of walking or taking the train, and a lot of domestic gadgetry.

Sustainability is a relatively uncommon argument in favour of the reduction of working time, but it might not be sufficient. In a hyper-consumerist society, would freeing up more time not just reinforce unsustainable patterns of consumption?

ANNA COOTE: The reduction of working time is no silver bullet. It is one policy that is needed alongside other policies, not least improving the living wage. There is some quite interesting work – although it certainly does not give us any definitive answers – on whether freeing up more time will just reinforce unsustainable patterns of consumption, which looks at leisure activities. Hobbies can either be cruel or kind to the environment, depending on the way we go about them. There's a kind of gradient of possibilities for the way we use our time.

For example, growing vegetables can be done in a very energy-neutral way, or you can use polytunnels, artificial lighting, and so on. So, it does depend on how everything is done. Juliet Schor has done an analysis of OECD countries that looks at their average paid working hours and their carbon emissions, and there is a correlation between shorter working hours and lower carbon emissions.

More generally in terms of sustainable development, my research on reduced working time started out based on the anticipation that the economy is not going to keep on growing. A lot of work has been done by Peter Victor, Tim Jackson, and other economists on this. An economy driven by the growth imperative is unsustainable. We cannot decouple growth from carbon emissions. Therefore, if you are going to have an economy that isn't growing, what we might call prosperity without growth, you've got to think about what it will do to the job market. A lot of people would say, and they'd be right, that if we don't change, there's going to be a lot of unemployment, a lot of unhappiness, and people would resist that kind of move.

Hervé Kempf in France has written on how the rich are destroying the planet – the more money and less time you have, the bigger your impact on the environment. How can we – structurally and through policy – address this link between sustainability, time, and individual purchasing power?

ANNA COOTE: First, we need government policy to improve the quality and quantity of public services, including public transport. We should also look at a maximum income, as a complement to a minimum income. Minimum income is quite well established now, the idea that nobody should fall below a certain level, the poverty line, and then you've got the living wage line. So could we identify – through dialogue – what is the maximum that people should have? This is a political challenge, an economic challenge, and a statistical challenge.

Wealthy people usually do have a higher environmental impact when they have several homes, lots of cars, and they fly a lot. But there does come the point at which people's income is still increasing but their damage to the planet does not continue to grow at the same pace; they can buy expensive things like paintings, which you can do with a lot of money, but it doesn't do much damage to the environment. We need to look in detail at the idea of a 'riches line', with a view to curbing the consumption patterns of those on higher incomes.

Some Green parties and trade unions are calling for a reduction of working time without loss of pay, or at least not for those with a low income. Is that realistic? What would be your policy recommendations to ensure that working-time reduction doesn't reinforce income inequality?

ANNA COOTE: You need to put any advocacy for reduced working hours with advocacy against low wages and practical steps to establish decent hourly rates of pay. For example, you need to ensure a guaranteed minimum income and to strengthen the bargaining power of trade unions so that they can make sure that hourly rates of pay are more compatible with reduced working hours. Then you have more innovative suggestions, like time-care credits, so if you are caring for a child or an elderly relative, you get a credit that can be paid towards your pension or redeemed in some other way. And then, most important of all in my view, is the social wage: the benefit of public services such as healthcare, education, social care, and public transport – all the things which enable us to meet our needs, which are partly or fully provided collectively through the state. The social wage has been estimated to have a massive redistributive effect because it amounts to a far higher proportion of the income of those who are poor than those who are better off. In a nutshell, reduced working hours must go hand in hand with a strong social wage, better power for trade unions, and decent hourly rates of pay.

Another reality across all sectors and positions in the labour market today is 'burn out': overworked employees pushed towards 60-hour weeks, unachievable deadlines, and constant online availability. Resistance to working-time reduction often comes from top executives who cannot imagine doing their job in fewer hours, thereby confusing leadership with control and power centralisation. How do we tackle this mindset in society and convey that it's also about sharing power?

ANNA COOTE: There is a quite large and growing group of top female executives in the UK, possibly in other countries too, who are campaigning for things like job sharing and reduced hours because they have often brought up children as well and it's been a struggle. Some of these senior female executives might be a good resource. A lot of senior male executives never see their children and are effectively cut off from their own family lives. Women are probably the key to the change.

Also worth considering are the chairmen and women who sit on the boards of big companies and work two or three days a week. We overlook how they almost prefigure the way we would like senior executives to work. They do important work, they work very little, yet they are paid very handsomely and are often extremely influential. So these are at least two routes for achieving that cultural change.

One of the most recent European experiences of working-time reduction has been the French 35-hour week introduced in 1998. While often criticised, detailed studies point to positive impacts as well. What lessons can be learnt from the French experience and what are the key aspects that should serve as guidelines for other initiatives in Europe, including in terms of implementation and political bargaining?

ANNA COOTE: The first of the two laws that introduced a shorter working week in France, the Aubry Laws, was mainly popular with the workforce, particularly with parents of young children. And many people were satisfied with it. Then there was a second law in response to a big lobby from employers who didn't want the 35-hour week. The second law shifted the balance of power from the workers to the employers by giving the employers more control over when the workers use their time. All in all, France still has much lower working hours on average than the UK does, for example. So it was a good innovation and we learned a lot from it about the importance of flexibility and arranging working hours to suit the needs of workers.

We have also learned about the dangers of governments introducing change too suddenly, making it too vulnerable to political opposition. If you have a much more gradual transition, say over 10 years, to shorter working hours, then you can change the climate of opinion as you go and build political support.

You mentioned the distribution of unpaid work as one of the reasons for the reduction of working time. Would this reduction help some of the long-lasting feminist struggles, such as narrowing the gender pay gap or achieving a more equal division of labour? What might the potential challenges or counter-productive effects be?

ANNA COOTE: The reduction of working hours could unlock the intractable problem of gender inequality. I would not like to suggest that this is the single solution, but I do think it would help to tackle the root of the problem. But this would only work if men as well as women take reduced hours and share more of the burden at home. The worst thing that could happen is that we get shorter working hours and it's mainly women who take them up, because that would just entrench this pattern of women doing the unpaid labour and men doing the paid labour. So there needs to be a lot more sharing of unpaid labour as well as reduction in paid working time for men and women. When you envisage a man and a woman living together with one or two children and they are both working 40 hours a week, for example, and they take a cut to 30 hours a week, you've got 20 additional hours that can be used for childcare. I am not in favour of exclusively domestically-based childcare, but I do think it could help to make childcare more affordable in countries like the UK where it's very expensive.

Whenever we talk about the reduction of working time, and this goes back now about seven or eight years, it is hugely popular with the media. When I go for an interview or I talk to somebody, it's nearly always women who are so keen on the idea because they are trying to juggle parenting and their career and so on, so there is a lot enthusiasm for it.



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is principal fellow at the New Economics Foundation. She has written widely on social justice, sustainable development, working time, public health policy, public involvement and democratic dialogue, and gender and equality.



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BRIDGING THE 82-KM HAPPINESS GAP

CAN ESTONIA STEM THE LABOUR EXODUS TO FINLAND?

ARTICLE BY
SILJA KUDEL

Exactly 82 km south of Finland – “the world’s happiest nation” – we find Estonia, a former Soviet state where average earnings are roughly 40 per cent of Finnish incomes. With tens of thousands of Estonian workers shuttling back and forth on the two-hour ferry voyage between Tallinn and Helsinki, we look at a snapshot of Estonia’s ongoing struggle with brain drain.

Tiny Estonia, an EU member since 2004, has a modern market economy and higher per capita income levels than most of its East European neighbours. Since independence in 1991, Estonians have been migrating abroad to build a better life. In addition to this permanent population loss, countless workers regularly commute across the Gulf of Finland to earn up to four times the income they would back at home.

One of them is Alar Soosaar (name changed). On Sunday afternoon, he packs his bags in Tallinn, kisses his wife and five-year-old son goodbye, and heads for the Tallink terminal, where he swipes his season ticket and boards the Helsinki-bound Superstar ferry. Roughly two hours later, he arrives at the flat he shares with six other construction workers from Estonia. The digs are modestly furnished, but Soosaar isn’t there to enjoy the creature comforts. He is in Finland temporarily, earning extra cash to send back to his family.

Soosaar has been working in Helsinki since 2016 as a demolition worker. Four days a week, he wakes at five in the morning, starts work at 7:00 am, and ends each workday at 17:30. The hours are long, but Soosaar appreciates the flexible schedule. Fridays are reserved for his family.

“I work in Helsinki from Monday to Thursday and return home to Tallinn on Thursday evening. I don’t commute every single week, because my son is five, and you only get to enjoy that once in a lifetime,” says Soosaar with a wistful smile.

When Soosaar arrives at the worksite early in the morning, he dons the proper protective gear: safety boots, helmet, gloves, and goggles. He has no complaints about his Finnish employer or the conditions, and he plans to continue working in Finland “until Estonian employers treat their workers as well as they do in Finland”.

“But I’ll definitely switch jobs if a better option comes along closer to home,” he hastens to add.

NO ‘TYPICAL’ CASE

Soosaar is one of an estimated 10 000 or more Estonian workers who regularly commute to Finland, the most popular destination for Estonian guest workers. The Finnish construction industry would grind to a halt without Estonian semi-skilled labour, as roughly half the construction workers in the Helsinki region are from Estonia. Significant numbers of Estonians also work as bus and lorry drivers, and in the hotel, cleaning, and catering industries.

Finns stereotypically associate the idea of ‘Estonian labour’ with blue-collar workers,

but research indicates that the reality is much more diverse. Educated labour is in high demand. “Many Estonians in Finland are working students and researchers, and they have white-collar jobs in fields like medicine, finance and technology,” explains Eveliina Louhivuori-Lampe, a PhD student of sociology at the University of Helsinki.

“My research in the tech industry has identified two groups of Estonian migrant workers. The first group have a full-time contract; they are permanent residents protected by Finnish labour laws. The other group have short-term contracts with temporary work agencies. They live in poorer but expensive accommodation, and their situation is much more precarious,” reports Louhivuori-Lampe.

There is also a growing tribe of professionals, academics, and specialists who commute up to several times per week. One of them is Aet Toots, a lecturer at the Estonian Business School in Helsinki. She has been commuting to Helsinki regularly since 2012.

“Travelling gets a little tiring, but it’s a good change. I haven’t encountered any problems or discrimination in Finland – only positive attitudes,” notes Toots.

There are no comprehensive statistics on the exact number of Estonian commuters, as foreigners residing in the country for less

than 12 months are not counted by Statistics Finland. Estimates vary wildly between 10 000 and 100 000, but the University of Tartu places the real figure around 20 000. In addition to commuters, there are over 50 000 Estonians residing permanently in Finland, reports Statistics Finland.

THE MONEY MAGNET

Even in the absence of exact statistics, a Sunday evening ferry trip from Tallinn to Helsinki confirms that Estonian workers are shuttling across the Baltic in staggering numbers. But what is driving them?

“Usually when we interview Estonian workers and ask them ‘Why are you in Finland?’ they reply: ‘Of course for the money!’” says Rolle Alho, a sociologist and postdoctoral fellow specialising in migration and labour market research at the University of Helsinki.

Their greatest motivator is indeed the prospect of higher earnings. According to Statistics Estonia, the average monthly gross income per employee in 2016 was 1073 euros, with 21.1 per cent of the population (nearly 276 000 people) living in relative poverty. By comparison, Statistics Finland reports that mean monthly incomes in Finland totalled 3368 euros in 2016.

Kaspar Oja from the Bank of Estonia predicts that Estonia is unlikely to attain Finland’s standard of living for at least another 30 years. Until then, the lure of a fatter pay packet will see a significant proportion of Estonia’s young workforce jetting off to greener pastures, primarily to Finland, but also to Germany and Sweden. “The income gap is vast, and Estonia is no longer a cheap country. Estonians who work in Finland come here for a better life, which effectively means a better income, but they also appreciate Finland’s good healthcare and social services,” notes Alho.

PLUGGING THE BRAIN DRAIN

The impact of ‘brain drain’ is an ongoing debate in Estonia. The loss of skilled labour is mentioned as one of the main threats to Estonian society in the *Estonian Human Development Report* for 2014/2015, but certain studies refute that labour migration is seriously damaging the Estonian economy.¹

One sector is undeniably impacted: healthcare. There are no reliable statistics on the number of doctors who have emigrated, but Estonia’s Healthcare Board reports that since EU accession, roughly 8 per cent of registered physicians have applied to practice abroad. With Finland suffering from a shortage of doctors, many young Estonian physicians

¹ Anniste, K., Tammaru, T., Pungas, E. & Paas, T. (2012). *Emigration after EU Enlargement: Was There a Brain Drain Effect in the Case of Estonia?* University of Tartu, Tartu.

are jumping at the chance to accept a well-paid position in Finland. As a result, Estonia's small towns and rural hospitals have been hard hit by the mass departure of skilled health professionals.

Healthcare aside, temporary emigration has many positive impacts on Estonia, for instance by increasing people's knowledge and skills.

Remittance inflows – money transfers sent home by foreign workers – possibly account for up to 2.5 per cent of GDP. The loss of working-age population is inarguably serious for Estonia, but certain analysts believe this problem is less related to emigration than to trends such as the low birth rate and the ageing of the population.²

SOCIAL EUROPE VS COMPETITION EUROPE

At the individual level, the opportunity to earn a better living in a foreign country is clearly a positive: Who would deny Alar Soosaar the right to secure a better future for his five-year-old son? Yet the transnational labour market has problematic implications, with broader social reverberations also felt in Finland.

AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL,
THE OPPORTUNITY TO
EARN A BETTER LIVING
IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY
IS CLEARLY A POSITIVE

“All across the continent, we are seeing unhealthy opposition between ‘Competition Europe’ and ‘Social Europe’. When foreign workers come to a new country and do the same jobs for less pay, this breeds ethnic tension, and we are seeing the consequences erupting partly in the form of Brexit and far-right populism,” theorises Alho.

The EU Commission plans to address this issue by setting up a new authority crack down on worker abuse and to ensure that rules on labour mobility are effectively enforced. The new European Labour Authority should be up and running in 2019 and reach full operational capacity by 2023.³

Estonian workers, too, have suffered abuses at the hands of foreign rental work agencies, but fortunately most cases of serious exploitation are a thing of the past. “There were Estonian workers being paid only a couple of euros per hour, and instances of private agencies duping workers by charging exorbitant commissions,” says Alho.

“But that was 10 years ago,” he adds. “Today, Estonians are better protected against unfair

² Among others, Lauri Peterson has argued that Estonia should refrain from a protectionist approach toward emigration and that the current system benefits both those who stay and those who leave. See *Emigration and its Effects on the Estonian Labor Market* (2013). bit.ly/2Hliby3

³ The European Labour Authority will be a new EU agency providing information on working in, or hiring people from, another EU country. It will also have a mediation function in case of cross-border disputes.

EVEN IN
FINLAND'S
'MILD' CASE,
MORE EFFORT
MUST BE MADE
TO PROTECT
THE RIGHTS
OF MIGRANTS

compensation and other forms of exploitation. In this respect, the Nordic states are different from countries like the UK and Ireland, where collective agreements offer less coverage.”

Like other Nordic countries, Finland has a high trade union density and legal structures ensuring that collective agreements have wide coverage. Finland’s comprehensive collective agreements specify the minimum terms and conditions of employment, such as pay, working hours, sick pay, and public holiday compensation, and also protect the rights of migrant workers, including those brokered by private agencies.

BEYOND THE SWEATSHOP

The moniker of ‘migrant worker’ often evokes the image of fearful labourers exploited by greedy bosses. Alho points out that this sweatshop stereotype does not really fit Estonian workers in Finland.

When Estonia joined the EU in 2004, there was a two-year transition period when Estonians needed a permit to work in Finland. This requirement was lifted in 2006, and it was during the first wave of labour migration that Estonians encountered problems.

“There was a fear that Estonians would arrive in masses and destroy our entire labour market with cheap labour. There were negative attitudes and cases of exploitation back then, but today Estonian workers enjoy comparatively good conditions in Finland, certainly compared to migrant workers in many other EU countries,” observes Alho.

This is not to say that labour exploitation is non-existent in Finland. Although Finnish legislation is in order, proper enforcement is sometimes lacking due to a shortage of resources. Appalling cases of unskilled migrants living in back rooms of restaurants and working seven days a week virtually without pay have recently made the headlines.

“Extreme cases of human trafficking mainly affect undocumented migrants from non-EU countries who do odd jobs in the catering and cleaning industries. They are third-country nationals such as asylum seekers from Iraq and other countries whose applications are turned down, so they go underground,” explains Alho.

Another group recently in the news are seasonal berry pickers from Thailand, who come for intense stints of summer work. “These workers are vulnerable to wage exploitation, because they lack official employee status. They are classed as self-employed entrepreneurs.”

‘GOOD’ VS ‘BAD’ MIGRANTS

Posted workers (employees sent by their employer to carry out a service in another EU Member State on a temporary basis) have also encountered problems. Alho offers the example of Polish construction workers employed at the Olkiluoto nuclear plant built by the French company Areva and its subcontractors. “The Poles have been living in cramped barracks for years – the project is running a whole decade behind schedule – and their family relationships have suffered. It’s unethical to subject workers to such poor conditions for such a prolonged period of time.”

Estonians are largely safe from such abuses, as they are mainly employed directly by Finnish companies, often in regulated industries or the

public sector. Estonian healthcare workers, for instance, enjoy identical rights and salaries to their Finnish colleagues.

Based on Alho’s research, Estonians are well-apprised of their rights in Finland. “Estonians generally speak Finnish quite well, so it’s easier for them to acquaint themselves with local practices. In this respect, they’re better off than, say, Poles or Russians. The Estonian community in Finland also readily shares useful information with fellow expats through social media networks.”

Negative attitudes and discrimination towards Estonians have subsided in the past decade in Finland. “Initially many Finns associated Estonians with crime and poverty. Today they are generally well-accepted and well-integrated in the labour market. In surveys, they are always top of the list of ‘good migrants’,” says Alho.

Research conducted by Louhivuori-Lampe nevertheless suggests that ethnic discrimination and stereotyping still goes on. “The most significant challenges were faced by female migrants, especially younger females with temporary contracts. One case involved a young Estonian programmer. In her male-dominated workplace she received a lower salary and was assigned irregular working hours. She also faced jokes and taunts which were highly sexualised in nature.”

Even in Finland's 'mild' case, such examples show that more effort must be made to protect the rights of migrants. "Key challenges range from ethnic and racial discrimination to lack of equal access, recognition, and pay, to severe exploitation. If we are to promote freedom of movement as a key European value, we need to address systemic challenges to both the economic and social rights of all migrants," she states.

TUNNEL OF PROSPERITY

Although income levels remain significantly lower in Estonia than in Finland, there is growing economic cooperation between the two countries. "There is a lot of start-up collaboration, many Finnish entrepreneurs are establishing businesses in Tallinn," says Alho.

Estonia, moreover, is not an economically homogenous country. Tallinn is quite wealthy compared to other parts of the country and benefits from Helsinki's proximity, in terms of business and tourism.

Mobility between the two northern capitals is set to grow exponentially in the future, with plans afoot to construct a new Helsinki-Tallinn railway tunnel connecting the Arctic region to the rail network of Central Europe. Travel time between the two cities would be reduced to only 30 minutes, creating a metropolitan twin-city region, 'Talsinki', of 3 million

inhabitants. "In the best-case scenario, we will see two connected capitals helping each other to become prosperous," predicts Alho.

Perhaps one day, in the not-so-distant future, Finland and Estonia might add substance to the notion of European citizenship and a fair labour market unfettered by national boundaries, as originally envisaged in the Maastricht Treaty 26 years ago.



SILJA KUDEL

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EARN MONEY ONLINE

THE POLITICS OF MICROWORK AND MACHINES

AN INTERVIEW WITH
ANTONIO CASILLI
BY **LORENZO MARSILI**

With hype around automation and robotisation at fever pitch, many argue that we will soon see mass labour disappear altogether. Sociologist Antonio Casilli begs to differ. Work is not disappearing, he argues in this interview with Lorenzo Marsili, but is being transformed by the giants of the digital economy. Understanding how the world of work is changing, and in whose interest, is the key political question of the future.

LORENZO MARSILI: You claim that fears of automation are one of the most recurrent human concerns. Do you think the alarm about “robots taking our jobs” should be toned down?

ANTONIO CASILLI: We are afraid of a ‘great substitution’ of humans by machines. This is quite an old concept, one we can trace back to early industrial capitalism. In the 18th and 19th centuries, thinkers like Thomas Mortimer and David Ricardo asked whether the rise of steam power or mechanised mills implied the “superseding of the human race.” This vision was clearly a dystopian prophecy that was never realised in the form originally predicted.

But when jobs were lost, it was because managers and investors decided to use machines – as they still do – as a political tool to put pressure on workers. Such pressures serve to push down wages and, by extension, to expand the profits made by capital. Machines therefore have a precise ideological alignment that typically benefits the part of society which possesses financial means, at the expense of that which works. As a result, the rhetoric around machines as inevitable and neutral job destroyers has been used for two centuries to squeeze the workforce and silence its demands. The discourse that surrounds automation today, with the accompanying fear of robots, is a reproduction of this same rhetoric.

Let's take a step back. The 'gig economy' has become synonymous with underpaid, precarious employment. You choose to focus on the concept of the 'microtask'. What does this concept refer to?

ANTONIO CASILLI: Microtasks are fragmented and under-remunerated productive processes. Examples include translating one line of a one-page text, watching 10 seconds of an hour-long surveillance video, and tagging the content of five images. Microworkers are usually paid a few cents per task. These tasks are usually posted on microwork platforms which function as labour markets or job search websites. Microworkers can choose the task they want to perform and are allocated a few minutes to complete it. Microtasks are becoming increasingly important in domains as wide-ranging as marketing, computer vision, and logistics, to name just a few. One of the smallest microtasks is the single click, which can be paid as little as one thousandth of a dollar.

Are we talking about a significant new phenomenon or is it more of a niche area?

ANTONIO CASILLI: We are faced with a statistical problem when investigating microwork, one shared with the gig economy and indeed every type of informal, atypical, or undeclared work. Their scale and pervasiveness are difficult to gauge with the usual statistical resources such

as large-scale surveys, models like the Labour Force Survey, data from the International Labour Organization, or businesses themselves supplying information voluntarily. As far as microwork alone goes, estimates vary wildly. The most conservative, like those of the World Bank, point to just 40 million microworkers. The most exaggerated, meanwhile, describe 300 million in China alone. Personally, I would estimate that there are around 100 million such workers in the world. But the real question is whether these 100 million are the seeds of a much broader tendency. If microwork indicates a way of working that is becoming the norm, how many workers are transforming into microworkers?

And would you say that all work is starting to resemble microwork?

ANTONIO CASILLI: If we look in detail at the evolution of a few particular professions, we can see that they are becoming fragmented and standardised. Take journalists and graphic designers. Instead of producing a campaign, an investigation, or some other project, like 10 or 20 years ago, they find themselves increasingly tasked with producing a small part of a larger project. They are assigned microtasks, to edit a line or to change the colour in a logo, while the rest is distributed to other people. The future of journalism is not threatened by algorithms that write pieces in place of humans, but by the owners of 'content mills' that do not demand

entire articles but three lines which are used to optimise algorithms. Because the websites in which these texts appear are found by search engines and not by readers, the texts are tailored with the algorithms in mind. Similar kinds of transformations seem to be taking place across a number of sectors.

One interesting aspect of these microjobs is the symbiosis between automated and manual processes. There are jobs that require 'teaching' machines and algorithms to make them more efficient for a given task, such as autonomous driving or image recognition. It seems like Star Trek in reverse, where it is no longer the machines that work for the humans but the humans that work for the machines.

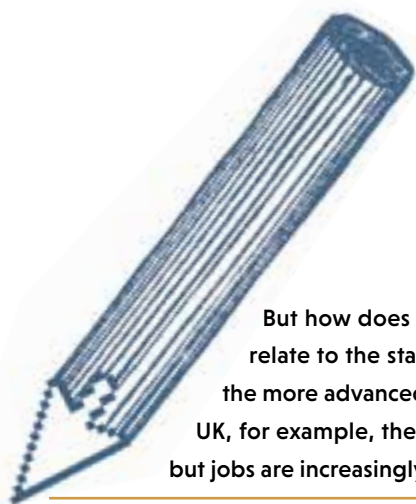
ANTONIO CASILLI: In a certain sense, we are seeing the old idea that computers are there for us to command overturned. What's happening now is that these objects that are a part of our everyday lives – our smartphones, our cars, our personal computers, and many more objects in our homes – are often used to run the automatic processes we call artificial intelligence. By artificial intelligence we mean processes that take decisions in a more or less automatic manner, and which learn, solve problems, and ultimately



make decisions, including purchases, in our place. But the problem is that we have this false idea that artificial intelligence is intelligent from its very inception. On the contrary, artificial intelligence needs to be trained, which is why we use terms like 'machine learning'. But who teaches artificial intelligence? If we still think the answer is engineers and data scientists, then we are making a big mistake. What artificial intelligence really requires is a huge quantity of examples, and these come from our own personal data. The problem is that this raw information we produce needs to be refined, cleaned, and corrected.

So this is where microwork comes in?

Yes, who wants to do this degrading, routine work? Many people recruited by microwork platforms come from developing countries where the labour market is so precarious and fragmented that they accept minimal remuneration. In return, they perform tasks that might include, for example, copying down a car license plate to provide data for the algorithm managing motorway speeding tickets, or to recognise 10 images, which might be used to provide data on pattern recognition.



But how does this expansion of microwork relate to the stagnation of labour markets in the more advanced capitalist economies? In the UK, for example, there is almost full employment but jobs are increasingly precarious and wages flat.

ANTONIO CASILLI: There is a longer-term trend here that became marked at the end of the 20th century. It consists in the segmentation of the labour market through a pronounced division between ‘insiders’, those who work in ‘formal’ jobs, and ‘outsiders’, who live on ‘odd jobs’. The so-called outsiders, who are used to moving from one job to another, are the first candidates on microwork platforms. What’s also happening, however, is that insider jobs are becoming less and less formal. The decline of formal work is the result of a political assault on the rights and numbers of salaried workers with the goal of increasing the profit share relative to the wage share. What we see as a result in Western labour markets is an ongoing movement of people from jobs that were traditionally in the formal sector into informal work. This trend is both a result of the huge wave of layoffs seen in recent years, as well as of the outsourcing of productive processes. Outsourcing sees many people leave formal jobs to become informal providers for the same company that previously employed them. These people are sometimes asked to leave companies to create their own small businesses and become subcontractors of their former employer.

So labour is not so much destroyed as transformed. Can this development be explained by today’s new monopoly capitalism, with a few large monopolies each dominating a specific platform service?

ANTONIO CASILLI: I would say that there is a process of concentration of capitalism but I don’t agree completely with the notion of monopoly capitalism. I tend to follow the school of thought presented by Nikos Smyrniotis, a Greek researcher, who wrote a book about oligopolistic capitalism, specifically regarding online and digital platforms. The point

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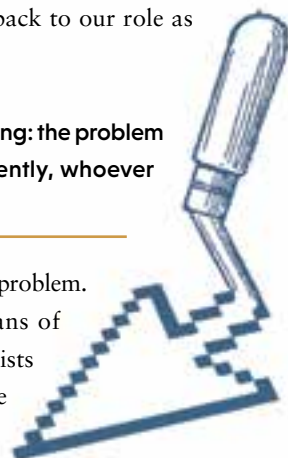
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of his analysis is that there is no such thing as a monopolistic approach to the digital economy. What actually happens is that, for structural and political reasons, these platforms tend to become big oligopolistic economic agents and tend to create what economists would describe as 'oligopsonies', or markets dominated by a few buyers, in this case buyers of labour. Thus a handful of big platforms buys labour from a myriad of providers, as happens on microtask services like Amazon Mechanical Turk. These platforms cannot become actual monopolies because they tend to compete amongst themselves.

One way of describing it today is by using quick acronyms like the GAFAM (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft). There are four or five big actors, big platforms, which despite being known for a specific product – whether it is the Google search engine or the Amazon catalogue – don't really have a 'typical' product either. Instead, they are ready to regularly shift to new products and new models. Look at Google's parent company, Alphabet: it trades in everything from military robot-dogs to think-tanks to fighting corruption. The only thing that is constant for these platforms across products and services is that they rely heavily on data and automated processes, that which we now call artificial intelligence. To capture the data they need to nourish the artificial intelligence they create and sell, they need people to create and refine this data. And so we are back to our role as digital producers of data.

So you would agree with the late Stephen Hawking: the problem is not the robots, but capitalism or, put differently, whoever controls the algorithmic means of production.

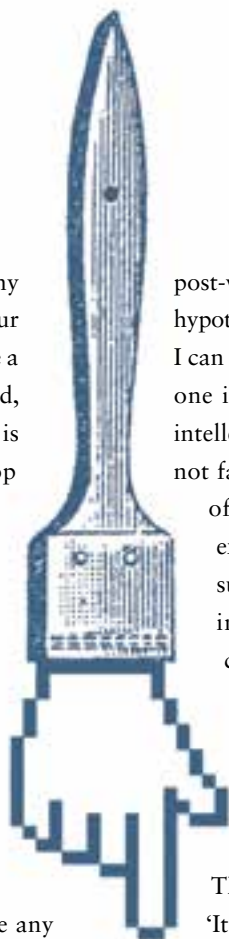
ANTONIO CASILLI: This has always been the main problem. The point today is that the algorithmic means of production have become an excuse for capitalists to take certain decisions that would otherwise cause popular uproar. If I were a CEO of a



big platform and I declared that my intention was to “destroy the labour market”, I would of course provoke a serious social backlash. But if I said, “I’m not destroying anything, this is just progress, and you cannot stop it”, nobody would react. Nobody wants to be identified with obscurantism or backwardness, especially on the Western Left, whose entire identity is rooted in historical materialism and social progress. So the cultural discourse of “robots who are definitely going to take our jobs” is designed to relieve industrial and political decision-makers from their responsibilities, and to defuse any criticism, reaction, or resistance.

So we need to push against the portrayal of these transformations as natural or magical events, as opposed to political choices. In the 1970s there was an early re-reading of Marx’s *Fragment on Machines*, led by Toni Negri and others, which developed the idea of a ‘cognitariat’ as a new political class that could rise up from new forms of immaterial labour. Where do you think that a political force to contest top-down automation might come from?

ANTONIO CASILLI: My own personal history is rooted in a specific intellectual milieu: Italian



post-workerism. Nevertheless, some of its hypotheses need to be critically reappraised. I can think of three in particular. The first one is the Marxist notion of a general intellect. With today’s platforms, we are not facing such a phenomenon. Our use of contemporary digital platforms is extremely fragmented and there is no such thing as progress of the collective intelligence of the entire working class or society. Citizens are facing relentless efforts deployed by digital capitalists to fragment, standardise, and ‘taskify’ their activities and their very existences.

The second point is that the bulk of ‘Italian theory’ is based on the notion of immaterial labour. But if we look at digital platforms, and the way they command labour, we see that there is no such thing as a dematerialisation of tasks. The work of Uber drivers or Deliveroo riders relies on physical, material tasks. Even their data is produced by a very tangible process, resting on a series of clicks that an actual finger has to perform.

And finally, we need to dispute the idea that such a political entity, a class of proletarians whose work depends on their cognitive capacities, actually exists. Even if it did, can we really characterise this political subjectivity as a cognitariat? If you read Richard Barbrook’s 2006 book *The Class of the New*, you’ll see

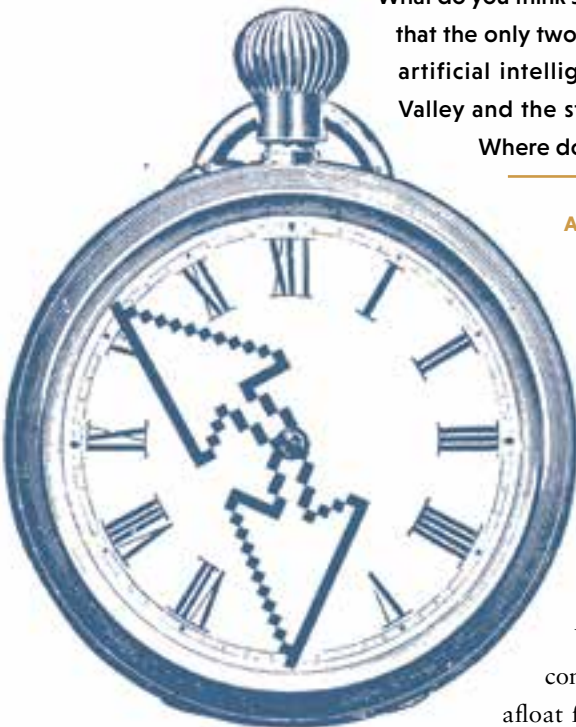
there's a long list of candidates for the role of Left-sponsored 'emerging political subjectivities', one for each time we experience technological or economic change. Between the 'lumpenproletariat', the 'cognitariat', the 'cybertariat', the 'virtual class', and the 'vectorialist class', the list could go on forever. But which one of these political and social entities is best suited to defending rights and advancing the conditions of its members? And more importantly, which is able to overcome itself?

What do you mean by overcome itself?

ANTONIO CASILLI: The world doesn't need a new class that simply establishes digital labour and the gig economy as the only way to be. We need a political subject that is able to think about an alternative.

What do you think should be the role of the state? It seems that the only two national ecosystems trying to govern artificial intelligence are the US and China: Silicon Valley and the state-driven 'Great Firewall of China'. Where does this leave Europe?

ANTONIO CASILLI: There is a question of what the role of the nation-state is in a situation where you have a dozen big players internationally whose power, influence, and economic weight are so vast that in some cases they surpass those of the states themselves. Yet states and platforms are not competitors; they collude. US multinationals are just as state driven as Chinese ones. US government funds and big agency contracts have been keeping Silicon Valley afloat for decades. Moreover, there's a clear



revolving door effect: Silicon Valley CEOs going to work for Washington think-tanks or for the Pentagon, like Google's Eric Schmidt for example.

To be extremely blunt, states should heavily regulate these multinationals, but at the same time they should adopt a policy of extreme *laissez-faire* when it comes to individuals, citizens, and civil society at large. Yet so far exactly the opposite has happened: generally speaking, states are repressing any kind of development or experimentation coming from civil society. They stigmatise independent projects by accusing them of being possible receptacles for terrorists, sexual deviants, and hostiles. Meanwhile, the big platforms are left free to do whatever they want. This situation has to change if we are to have actual political and economic progress.



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DR STRANGELOVE

OR HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE ROBOT

ARTICLE BY

NATHALIE SCHIRVEL

In a relatively short period of time, the Western healthcare system will undergo structural and organisational upheaval caused by an ageing population, exponential growth in numbers of the chronically ill, technological advances, and a shortage of caregivers. One possible solution to this problem is the automation of medical work using artificial intelligence. But if the patient becomes the sole manager of their health, what happens to the other workers and stakeholders in the healthcare sector?

FR

HEALTHCARE BY ALGORITHM

It is the year 2033, Michelle is 87. She lives alone in her apartment, which lies in a new residential building designed for the elderly in an affluent neighbourhood, 6 miles from Brussels. She loves to bake nice cakes for her great-grandchildren when they come to visit. She also loves chatting with them on the giant screen in her living room when they get home from school.

Michelle is part of the post-war baby-boomer generation. Now a 'granny boomer', she symbolises an ageing Europe. Throughout her life, Michelle has benefited from huge advances in medicine and has seen her life expectancy lengthened thanks to close medical and social care, which is costly in terms of both human and financial resources.

When Michelle took a fall three years ago after getting up in the night to go to the toilet, her petbot (everyone seems to have one of these cute algorithm-based robotic animals these days) sent an alert to the smartphones of her nearest and dearest (friends, family, and carers). The petbot generated a geolocalised call to the person nearest to Michelle's

This article is available in its original language (French) on the Green European Journal website.

DOCTEUR FOLAMOUR OU : COMMENT J'AI APPRIS À NE PLUS M'EN FAIRE ET À AIMER LES ROBOTS

Comme en atteste le secteur des soins de santé en Europe – stratégique et important fournisseur d'emplois – la nature du travail humain et le monde du travail vont être profondément bouleversés par la révolution digitale.

home so they could come over to help her up. The petbot also alerted emergency services.

The team supervising Michelle's neighbourhood instantly received the information necessary to make a clinical decision: her pulse, heart regularity, blood sugar level, temperature, level of consciousness, and medical history. The primary care team waited for visual contact with the person who went to help Michelle in her home. Thanks to the data provided by this person via the petbot's communication interface, the algorithm was able to decide that medical assistance was not necessary.

So, thanks to the automated environment provided by her insurer, Michelle didn't spend the whole night on the floor waiting for help, she was not discovered at noon the next day when her carer came to help her make lunch; Michelle didn't panic and call an ambulance, and didn't spend five days in hospital under observation because she had spent nine hours on the cold floor of her bedroom.

Remote monitoring of her vital signs isn't the only technology that Michelle benefits from. Without even having to use a smartphone or a complicated piece of software, Michelle receives an optimal level of care. Her blood pressure is monitored each week via a discreet bracelet. Her petbot records information and sends it monthly to the primary care team. The nurse keeps in regular video contact

with Michelle to update her on changes to treatment, and no longer needs to visit her frequently to measure her health parameters or check she's taking her medication.

As far as medication is concerned, the artificial intelligence included in the petbot also calculates changes in dose necessary based on the parameters measured and recorded, and suggests them to the doctor in the primary care team.

When the doctor approves a change in medication, the prescription is sent directly to the robot in the local pharmaceutical centre, which manufactures the pills using 3D technology so they are completely tailored to Michelle, and also contain the three other drugs that she must take daily. The new box of pills is delivered to her home the next day by drone, and Michelle confirms receipt with a finger print or through facial recognition. She puts the pills in her petbot, which instantly notifies the doctor that the new course of treatment has started. When authorised by Michelle, her friends and family are also informed of the changes made to her treatment programme. Thanks to her petbot, Michelle never forgets to take her pills.

Her Uber Health subscription lets Michelle schedule trips to the hospital for tests; she no longer has to ask her daughter to take her. Her smart fridge sends an automatically generated shopping list to the local distribution centre.

When she has to do physiotherapy exercises to rehabilitate the shoulder that she injured in a fall, Michelle uses virtual drumsticks to play music controlled by the motion sensor built into the camera of the TV in her living room.

Eventually, Michelle is able to stop taking pills to help her sleep and no longer risks falling in the night due to their side effects. Every night, Michelle's petbot launches a programme to help her sleep, with music, a soothing voice, and comforting colours. Michelle is no longer anxious because she knows that her petbot will watch over her at night and warn those close to her if there's a problem.

For every aspect of Michelle's health – physical, psychological, and social – there is an automated care solution.

AN AGEING HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

Today, almost 20 per cent of Europe's population is over the age of 65. But often overlooked is that an ageing Europe goes hand in hand with a sick and dependent Europe, because longevity is not associated with a reduction in ill health. While medical advances have allowed us to extend the lives of the chronically ill, they have not enabled us to completely cure them.

Demographic forecasts are telling: the proportion of Europeans aged 65 or over will double between 2010 and 2050, while the proportion of those over 80 will double by 2080, from roughly 6 per cent today to 12 per cent. Dependence levels will grow too,¹ from almost 30 per cent now to 50 per cent in 2080. Furthermore, it is estimated that 60 per cent of the European population will be obese by 2050, with current levels of obesity three times those of 1980. Cases of cancers and diabetes will also follow this trend.

As Europe ages, the Europeans that care for its population are ageing too. In 2009, 30 per cent of European doctors were aged over 55. These doctors are now nearing 65 or so, and most are at the end of their careers. Yet healthcare is one of the largest sectors of Europe's economy, employing almost 17 million people and accounting for 8 per cent of all jobs.² It faces three major challenges. There are not enough new entrants to the workforce to replace those retiring. The psychological conditions particular to this type of work result in a quick turnover. And new technologies require advanced and continuous training across the whole sector.

The health policies adopted by European states fail to provide an adequate response. On the one hand, there is a lack of investment

¹ The old-age-dependency ratio is the ratio of the number of elderly people at an age when they are generally economically inactive (i.e. aged 65 and over), compared to the number of people of working age (i.e. 15-64 years old).

² European Commission (2012). Commission Staff Working Document on an Action Plan for the EU Health Workforce. bit.ly/2qm4NiF



in prevention to halt the growth in chronic disease and, on the other, mechanisms that limit the numbers of healthcare professionals persist (through the restructuring and merger of healthcare organisations or the restriction of access to medical and paramedical degrees seen since the 1990s).

While the period between 1960 and 1990 saw the number of doctors triple in most OECD members (except the United Kingdom and Japan) leading to an abundance in certain countries (Greece, Spain, Italy, and Belgium), numbers have stagnated since the 1990s and no longer seem sufficient to meet long-term needs. Despite the clear lack of scientific evidence justifying the setting of quotas to regulate the use of healthcare, limited access to the medical profession through quotas remains the norm in Europe.

Since April 1993, thanks to a European directive doctors have been able to move freely across the EU and mutual recognition of their qualifications has been facilitated. But free

movement has lacked oversight and failed to take into account different levels of income or different healthcare structures in each EU Member State.

What's more, any analysis of medical demographics in Europe is complicated by two main factors: differences in the organisation of public healthcare from one country to another, and the lack of a shared definition for healthcare professionals. For example, a general practitioner in Belgium does not have the same skills or functions in a healthcare organisation as a primary care provider in the UK or Ireland.

Despite the clear willingness to allow the free movement of healthcare professionals, health planning policy is one of the poor relations of European integration. Indeed, it is only since 2010 that some national professional bodies have started working together to improve the assessment of migratory flows and their impact on the functioning of healthcare systems across Europe. This apparent lack of political foresight and concerted action on health planning will, by accident or design, profoundly transform the organisation of healthcare.

NEW
TECHNOLOGY
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A SEEMINGLY
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AREAS WHERE
HUMAN
CONTACT SEEMS
IRREPLACEABLE

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR OUR HEALTHCARE SYSTEM?



Along with education, healthcare is one of the last areas in which automation and digitisation have yet to become widespread. New technology is ready to provide a seemingly personalised service in areas where human contact seems irreplaceable.

And while Europeans (patients and healthcare professionals) remain reluctant to use new healthcare technologies and share their health data, the generation that has grown up with smartphones in their hands will quickly change this situation. In the last five years alone, healthcare has been bombarded by new technologies. Private platforms for consulting doctors online have proliferated; connected devices that measure vital signs have become commonplace; health-monitoring and coaching mobile apps have exploded – with insurers and social security systems beginning to pay for certain apps – and states have implemented e-health plans to connect healthcare professionals and patients as part of wider e-government projects.

The economic and medical implications are enormous: not only is the pharmaceuticals and healthcare sector financially attractive – currently considered one of the most promising to invest in by financial markets,³ with e-health having just been opened to private-sector competition – but it is a way of reducing healthcare costs. Mobile health applications were worth 25 billion dollars worldwide in 2017. A study published in *The Lancet* in November 2017 estimated that the widespread adoption of digital health applications for five types of patients (diabetes prevention, diabetes, asthma, cardiac rehabilitation, and pulmonary rehabilitation) could save the United States' healthcare system 7 billion dollars a year.⁴

3 Debbie Carlson (January 2018). The Best Stock Market Sectors in 2018. *U.S. News*. bit.ly/2qjOxiD

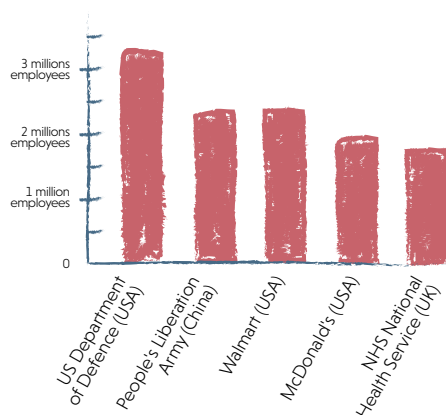
4 Does Mobile Health Matter? *The Lancet*. Vol. 390. (Nov. 18, 2017) bit.ly/2EzMjAl

 Employment in the healthcare sector in the EU27
 Employment in all other sectors in the EU27



In 2010 there were around 17.1 million jobs in the healthcare sector in the EU27

SOURCE: European Commission SWD(2012) 93 final on an Action Plan for the EU Health Workforce



The largest employers in the world in 2015 (including companies, militaries, and governments)

SOURCE: *Forbes* 'The World's Biggest Employers'

The end of the 20th century saw the traditional silos of healthcare organisation in industrialised countries begin to break down, with medical tasks shifting from doctors to paramedical personnel and doctor-nurse tandems becoming common. The 21st century will herald DNA repair, the replacement of medical expertise by algorithms, and health self-management by patients. The automated reading of health parameters will free doctors and nurses from a whole series of repetitive tasks. Patients will be empowered by e-learning, and chatbots (automated conversation programmes responding to keywords) will take over medical monitoring with the latest algorithms providing quality care that is scientifically proven.

While the patient-caregiver relationship remains the cornerstone of the placebo effect

(patients feeling they are being listened to and treated plays a key role in healing), studies show that users of mobile health apps feel they are better supported and listened to than in the current system where the doctors are forced to limit contact time when their workload is too large.⁵

Healthcare automation will not only save time in managing people's health events, it will also lower the critical threshold of primary-care physicians necessary to meet our healthcare needs. We are facing a major shift in public health in terms of the treatment of health problems, prevention policies, and the organisation of healthcare systems.

As she gets older, Michelle will witness the transformation of whole swathes of medical

⁵ Powell, Rhea E. et al. (May/June 2017). Patient Perceptions of Telehealth Primary Care Video Visits. *Annals of Family Medicine*. Vol. 15 no. 3 225-229.

specialties. Instead of a radiologist, an artificial intelligence programme will analyse her scan to check that her cancer is still in remission. When she needs insulin to control her diabetes, a device implanted in her stomach will automatically calculate the dose to deliver without the aid of a nephrologist. If Michelle has a car accident that damages her stomach, 3D printing of human tissues and organs will speed up the surgeon's work. The health insurance that Michelle will have to take out will use precise risk reduction tools. And Michelle's future great-grandchild will benefit from genetic diagnostics and possibilities for early repair.

AN INEVITABLE REORGANISATION

Healthcare automation will bring with it a specific set of problems. Private databases of medical records carry the risk of breaches in medical confidentiality and open the door to greater commercialisation of medical data. With more algorithmic profiling (even if this is regulated by the new General Data Protection Regulation), educating and training people in self-management and the use of IT tools will be essential. Energy consumption will increase. Access to these new technologies will be a source of inequality, and cross-border and virtual consumption of healthcare will make public health policy difficult to organise and forecast at a national level.

The revolution in preventive and regenerative medicine brought about by innovations in genetics will profoundly change medical treatment and make curative medicine obsolete, so it is essential to quickly reform the training of caregivers. Rapidly modernising training is especially important as healthcare education and organisation are high-inertia systems that will not keep pace with the dynamism of the tech sector. In tomorrow's world, we will have even greater need for doctors, but they will have to work alongside engineers and computer scientists to create and manage healthcare tools.



NATHALIE SCHIRVEL

holds a Masters in Medicine from Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium. She worked for five years as a private general practitioner until, faced with the difficulty of properly performing her work in the absence of coordination in public health, she turned to the study of healthcare management, where she focuses on the rampant privatisation of the health sector and the lack of long-term vision for health policies.



TOUCHY ABOUT TECHNOLOGY

JOBS AND THE CHALLENGE FOR THE LEFT

AN INTERVIEW WITH
**MADY DELVAUX-
STEHRES** BY **LAURENT
STANDAERT**

A technological revolution is coming, on that point everyone seems to agree. Beyond this, there are no clear answers. Mady Delvaux-Stehres, a Luxemburgish Socialist MEP, argues for an industrial policy for Europe, a new education system, and a critical appraisal of how the Left thinks about robots and artificial intelligence.

LAURENT STANDAERT: What connections do you see between the future of work and advances in robotics and artificial intelligence?

MADY DELVAUX-STEHRES: The initial reaction, whether in the European Parliament or with people I talk to in the street, is: “We don’t want robots because they’ll take our jobs.” The experience of the last industrial revolution and its technological advancements shows this perspective to be a bit of fantasy. While jobs were destroyed, new ones were created too, though the process was nevertheless accompanied by social conflict. The primary concern must be ensuring a decent life for people over preserving the interests of industry, which should be a tool at the service of humanity. The current industrial revolution will change many things, as is already happening. But the qualitative difference this time is that it is not simply physical work that is being replaced by machines, some of the ‘intellectual’ work in the service sector is being replaced by artificial intelligence too. In the future, there won’t be trainee lawyers compiling hundreds of pages of case law anymore, artificial intelligence will do it.

Will enough jobs be created to offset the jobs that are lost?

MADY DELVAUX-STEHRES: That’s the real question. It’s easy to say that jobs will be lost, but it’s harder to know where the new comes will come from. Compared to the last industrial revolution, innovation and



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**TECHNOLOGIE, JE
T'AIME... MOI NON
PLUS: LES DÉFIS
POUR LE TRAVAIL
ET LA GAUCHE**

Dans cet entretien, l'eurodéputée Mady Delvaux-Stehres parle des enjeux pour l'emploi, mais aussi pour la gauche et les forces progressistes en Europe, face aux évolutions technologiques.

production cycles are much faster. How can we keep up with this change whilst making sure that there aren't too many people left behind? With each cycle, there are winners and losers, but how can we best guarantee a safety net for those who need it?

What are the top priorities in the face of rapid technological change?

MADY DELVAUX-STEHRES: Inequality! From which stem questions of social protection and education, both of vital importance. First, we must break the link between employment and social protection, and second, we must promote lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is especially complicated, we're talking about a new kind of education system based on different methods.

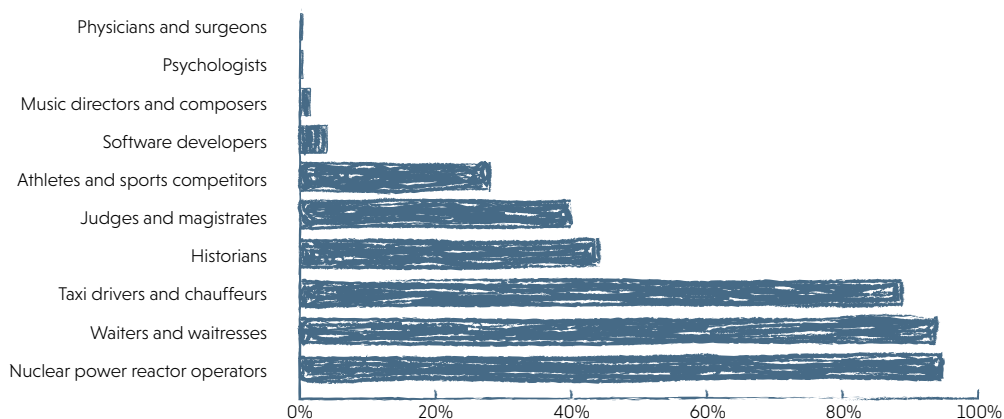
Why and how would you go about changing the education system?

MADY DELVAUX-STEHRES: Education should inspire and teach creativity, imagination, and understanding of technology. But it's a sector that struggles to change and is weighed down by a big bureaucracy. Beyond these constraints, how can we teach creativity? Is everyone willing and able to be educated in this way? When we look at statistics for lifelong learning, it's clear that the people who benefit most are those with the highest level of education. We need to reverse this trend, but how?

For its part, the European Commission is working to define a matrix of different skills for different education levels, mapping the skills needed to cope with the current technological revolution. It's an important exercise as we strive to define which skills the education system needs to include. But in this debate, we often end up saying that we need to teach people how to code. I don't think this is the answer. Not everyone should learn how to code or is going to become a programmer. With longer life expectancy and changes in attitudes to work, we need to imagine a system where we leave school but can return later. In many countries, certainly in Luxembourg, there is an idea that you get an initial education and then that's it, you're set for life. I don't think that view of education will work anymore.

Trends in education seem to be mirroring those in the world of work, could robotics and automation widen inequality?

MADY DELVAUX-STEHRES: Fears around widening inequalities are justified, not just in terms of education but income and wealth too. In today's world – without reform – I don't see who will pay for access to artificial intelligence and its benefits, when there are any, for the most vulnerable. There are enormous benefits to different applications of robotics and artificial intelligence, in the area of health for example, but who is going to fund access for the entire population? Social security systems



Risk of being replaced by a robot (calculation for the US, unspecified timeframe)

SOURCE: Carl Benedikt Frey and Michael Osborne (2013). *The future of employment: How susceptible are jobs to computerisation?* Oxford Martin Programme on Technology and Employment.

are becoming harder and harder to fund, and their link with employment is a problem for the future.

In most cases, Most European governments continue to draw significant proportions of their revenues from taxing employment.

MADY DELVAUX-STEHRES: Experts and studies are divided on the crucial issue of whether technological change will mean fewer jobs, as many jobs, or more jobs – the most important thing is to be prepared. Everywhere people are talking about the difficulties in funding pensions, health insurance, unemployment benefits, and so on. Taxes are levied on salaries so if there are fewer jobs, we're headed for trouble. And yet all this time, we're seeing lower taxation on businesses and capital. We no longer dare to tax the rich, it's crazy! I've seen lots of potential ideas and innovations in terms of taxation in my political career but in reality, the same formulas are always trotted out. It's like with value-added tax;

because it already exists, it's less painful to put it up by a percentage point. We need to think about other systems of funding, but it's a taboo subject at the European level. Tax touches on core competences of the nation-state and today the European Union is a system of competition between member nation-states. An EU country that decides to introduce a new tax becomes paranoid that it's not competitive enough for investors compared to its neighbours.

You mentioned a tax on robots...

MADY DELVAUX-STEHRES: Oh dear, what a disaster! But it stayed in my parliamentary report.

Why a disaster?

MADY DELVAUX-STEHRES: Industry screamed that a robot tax would put the brakes on innovation, which is not totally false. More fundamentally, in practice, how do you define and identify a robot? Beyond the idea of a

tax, today it's important and useful to have classifications. A robot vacuum cleaner is not the same as a driverless car, a drone, or a surgical robot. And if robots are the new 'workers', then we need to know what we mean by robot. Going back to taxation, if robots aren't an option, I see potential in a financial transactions tax. Of course we can imagine all sorts of taxes, but the reality is that there is very little willingness to discuss them, even in the European Parliament.

Regardless of the categories of robotics or artificial intelligence, does their advance force us to break the financial link between social protections and the employment of humans in traditional jobs?

MADY DELVAUX-STEHRES: I do think so as I said earlier but we've yet to have this debate.

Studies show that the jobs at greatest risk of robotisation and automation are in Central and Eastern Europe. What will happen regarding inequalities between countries, not just within them?

MADY DELVAUX-STEHRES: Inequalities between European countries are well established, they are very worrying as they are, and there is a very real risk of them worsening. The problem has been clearly identified but we don't have a real answer – European structural funds are a drop in the ocean. On the other hand,

artificial intelligence could be an opportunity for countries to concentrate know-how in a specific region. The European Commission supports this approach with programmes such as that supporting the pan-European network of digital innovation hubs.

This issue of disparity and non-convergence between EU countries is indirectly related to another question raised by your report: do we need a European industrial policy?

MADY DELVAUX-STEHRES: We don't really have big European champions. We have national champions. I'm not a specialist in industrial policy, but it seems to me that the desire to prevent monopolies or large conglomerates within the European Union at any cost is not helping European presence at a global level. Only large European industries can hope to compete with China and the United States. But today this idea is sometimes considered heretical in Europe. Our small companies are being bought by American and Chinese investors, they aren't bought by Europeans. For example, a Belgian robotics company I recently visited couldn't find any capital in Europe, but then Chinese investors made them a fantastic offer. The Chinese firm Midea has purchased German giant Kuka. French start-up Aldebaran Robotics, creator of the Nao robot, has been taken over by the Japanese group SoftBank for the same reasons.

Will digital economy and technology be on the agenda for the 2019 European elections?

MADY DELVAUX-STEHRES: The large Member States are developing strategies and calling for action from the Commission, so technology will feature in the campaign. However, a wider societal debate still has to take place, difficult as it is. Today, there's lots of talk about data protection and the Facebook scandal, but profound systemic changes are not on the table. People don't want to scare voters.

Is technology a real problem for the Left in Europe? Does the Left see technology as anti-worker?

MADY DELVAUX-STEHRES: This is a debate I've recently had in my own party. I'll give you my point of view: I think that a party of the Left should be open to modernity and the future, and that we can't be against technology. We have to take ownership of technology, to place it at the service of workers, social cohesion, and the fight against inequality. If we don't, conservatives will use it against the majority of the population.

In Europe, are there any points of consensus among the Left on the question of technology?

MADY DELVAUX-STEHRES: No, there aren't. I despair at this mistrust. People focus on a single aspect, which is "jobs are being lost, so we're against it", but that's not an answer. ■



MADY DELVAUX-STEHRES

is a Luxembourgish Socialist MEP. She is vice-chair of the Legal Affairs committee and substitute in the Economic and Monetary Affairs committee. She was rapporteur of the report on Civil Law Rules on Robotics and Chair of the Working Group on Robotics and Artificial Intelligence. Prior to being elected to the European Parliament in 2014, she held various ministerial positions in Luxembourg over the past 20 years. She was notably Minister for Education and Minister of Social Security, Transport, and Communication.



FILLING IN THE CRACKS

VISIONS OF SOCIAL PROTECTION THAT WORKS

Through their history, European welfare state models have linked social protection to employment, or the search for it. New and emerging forms and patterns of work and demographic changes across Europe call for social protection systems to be reformed and upgraded. But to what extent and what are the alternatives? The *Green European Journal* provides a sample round-up of proposals and perspectives on social protection and the future of work.

VILLE YLIKAHRI

THE FINNISH GREENS' BASIC INCOME MODEL

In Finland, our current social security model is based on the idea of permanent and full employment. Yet the reality is different from this ideal, which leaves our system with challenges that it is unable to resolve: the social security of temporary workers, project workers, and entrepreneurs is weak, while unemployed people are discouraged from taking on short-term work. To overcome this problem, the Finnish Greens have been promoting the idea of an unconditional basic income (UBI) since the 1980s, and they presented their first comprehensive, calculation-based basic income model in 2007.

Currently, we propose a basic monthly income of 560 euros to be distributed to all adult citizens and residents (except pensioners, whose basic income is covered by the current guaranteed pension, which is still above the level of the unconditional basic income). The main purpose of the UBI model is not to change the income distribution of the country, but to improve the social security system in a way that is simpler and safer for people. Moreover, we believe that in a rich country like Finland, everyone should get a share of

the wealth of the nation, regardless of their social status. Not to mention that we believe in each and every individual's capability to make good choices for themselves. Thus, providing them with a small monthly income, without any set conditions, is a reasonable measure in our view.

The current UBI level of 560 euros is of course not enough to make ends meet in Finland; it has to be supplemented by housing and social allowances for people with no income (as is now the case with unemployment benefits), but our argument is that it is reasonable to make the basic level of social security unconditional and universal.

Upon publishing the model, we insisted on a pilot study of the basic income, which the current, right-wing government of Finland has now implemented. In their pilot, a small number of unemployed people receive a basic income of 560 euros. This is equivalent to the unemployment insurance they would receive; however, they will continue to receive the basic income even if they find work or start receiving other forms of income. This will help us determine how people's behaviour and incentives would be altered by this new form of income, and whether there is an increased willingness on the side of the unemployed population to return to the labour market if they don't lose their benefit payments once they start working.

The government's pilot study is in many respects incomplete (for example, the taxation was not changed thereby making the programme seem much more expensive than it actually is), but it is nevertheless proof that UBI is more than a utopian idea, and that it can indeed be put into practice. Also, the latest UBI model of the Finnish Greens was built on the microsimulations calculated by the Finnish Parliament's information service and has exposed many problem areas that still need to be addressed – for example, that it is difficult to combine the UBI with housing benefits in a flexible way, and that the basic income model does not completely remove all economic disincentives. These problems will be addressed once we start improving our model on the basis of the results of the ongoing pilot study.

In order to make up for the extra costs associated with a UBI scheme, and to provide additional government revenue sources besides income and capital income taxes, the real estate tax will be increased and environmentally harmful tax subsidies will be cut. Moreover, taxes on consumption and energy use could be increased, as the basic income itself will already have made consumption and energy, at least up to a reasonable point, more affordable than they are now. Once these measures are taken, basic income will not cost any more than the current social security system. In addition, the national economy would benefit from the

fact that increasing the rate of employment always makes economic sense, and we would see a boost in entrepreneurship among the unemployed population. The basic income also facilitates the integration of social security and employment, thus reducing social exclusion, and it makes it easier for parents of young children to reduce their working hours and potentially achieve an improved quality of life.

We have not made calculations and plans regarding future changes of the labour market as currently there are still enough jobs in Finland. There is even demand for additional workers – the problem is that, at the moment, the needs of employers are not matched by the skills or location of the unemployed. Past experience has also shown us that fears in Finland about job losses associated with robotisation were unfounded in the last few decades. While many jobs in agriculture and factories have disappeared, new jobs have been created in the service sector. Thus, I believe Finland will retain jobs in the future, but nevertheless UBI will provide people with basic security in an ever-changing labour market.

BRU LAÍN ESCANDELL

BARCELONA'S BASIC INCOME PILOT

The economic crisis has hit Barcelona hard, and its aftershocks can still be felt. In the past few years, thousands of people have

been evicted from their homes. Since 2014, the number of homeless people has increased by more than 60 per cent. House prices went up by 9.2 per cent in 2017, meaning that Barcelona's poorest inhabitants will face even more difficulties in the years to come. Unemployment in the city has skyrocketed, making it even harder for the most vulnerable parts of society to escape poverty. All this explains why the city council is stepping in to mitigate these growing problems.

The B-MINCOME programme in the city of Barcelona is a pilot of an innovative strategy for municipal social policies that aims to improve social protection and make workers who are out of the labour market employable again. It is wider and more complex than a conventional basic income programme since it combines cash-transfer benefits on a household basis with four different types of active policies.

The experiment we run is taking place in Besòs, an area in the north of the city. The participants are drawn from a pool of social benefit recipients. A sample of 2000 households was randomly selected. Half ended up in the control group, while the other 1000 were assigned to one of the pilot groups. These 1000 pilot households receive a monthly cash allowance of between 100 and 1670 euros depending on their composition, overall income, and housing expenses.

Among the 1000 households to receive monthly allowances, the payment is being trialled with varying conditions. 550 of the households have been enrolled in one of the city's four social programmes: professional training or education courses, a social and cooperative economy programme, a refurbishment programme to expand the offer of spare rooms to let, and a community-building programme. For some of these households, payment of the monthly allowance is conditional on participation in the social programme they have been randomly assigned. Other families, however, are allowed to drop out of the social programme without losing their cash allowance. The remaining 450 households of the pilot group do not participate in these social programmes and just receive the cash allowance, resembling an unconditional basic income. Again, this group is divided into two parts: one that receives the cash allowance regardless of any other extra income, and a 'limited' group in which any other income reduces the cash allowance. The aim of segmenting the pilot group is to test whether 'poverty traps' really affect people's capacity to improve their own situation and escape from poverty.

With this experiment, our goal is to test whether the conditions associated with most social policies do in fact reduce poverty and inequality or, on the contrary, whether unconditional schemes would be more effective. In addition, we expect to determine

which of the four social programmes (in its conditional or unconditional form) suits our specific goals better. The EU's Urban Innovative Actions initiative has provided the programme with a grant of 5 million euros, while an additional 12 million euros came from the city council. We believe that once the project has been tested and we have drawn conclusions from our findings, we will be able to finance the continuation of the project by ourselves. The Barcelona en Comú party has already expressed interest in implementing a city-wide programme if the results of the experiment prove favourable in terms of social protection and employability.

Although the pilot's main goal is not to find solutions to future labour market challenges, such as automation, the increasing role of platforms, or the ageing workforce, there are some ways it might do so. The refurbishing programme for flats included in the project will see the city council provide homeowners with funds to renovate a room to rent out, which can both provide extra income and help tackle the housing shortage. While there are many people who own a relatively large home and whose income has decreased despite them working long hours, they are often unwilling to rent out spare rooms out of fear that they might be taken advantage of by bad tenants. To overcome this fear, the city council is helping match owners with tenants and provides insurance.



The social and cooperative economy programme also holds potential, not just to create jobs in existing sectors but also to encourage social entrepreneurship and strengthen the community-based economy. During the crisis years, jobs in cooperative platforms were among the most resistant to shocks, and cooperatives were much less likely to lay off workers than private businesses. They can provide a much safer and more reliable labour market than that which we experience today.

RICCARDO MASTINI

JOBS WITHOUT GROWTH

There is now overwhelming evidence that national GDP cannot grow without polluting the environment and depleting our natural resources. Since the plundering of the earth's bounty has already reached unsustainable levels, our future economy will inevitably need to be built around the idea of degrowth. Our system of social protections has to adapt to this

reality. The adoption of the economic policy proposal known as the job guarantee would not only ensure universal social protection but would also achieve full employment while our societies move towards an economy no longer centred around growth. With a job guarantee, these objectives would be attainable without sacrificing our access to the goods and services needed to live life in dignity.

The job guarantee requires national governments to act as 'employers of last resort', offering a uniform wage and benefits package to anyone who is willing to work. Having a job remains an essential value in our societies and is widely seen as an important component of human dignity. The job guarantee serves as the ideal, temporary solution; necessary until we experience a profound change in our perception of work. The future of social protection may ultimately lie in a universal basic income or something different but, until human dignity has been decoupled from the idea of employment, introducing a job guarantee would represent a huge step forward.

Under a job guarantee, the government's role as a major provider of employment, with an increased say in which goods and services are produced, could be a source of ecological sustainability. The government could set the ground for a switch from environmentally and socially destructive forms of production based on financial profits and encourage a

move towards a system organised around meeting fundamental social and ecological needs. Workers hired under a job guarantee could do any job that has a social value, and we could potentially broaden our conception of work to include things like caring for the elderly, habitat restoration, and community services. Moreover, with the weight of the profit motive diminished, there would be an opportunity to reduce production to a level in harmony with our needs and allow workers to enjoy the benefits of reduced working hours.

The job guarantee would also act as a wage floor. Every working person would have the option of alternative employment in a job guaranteed by the state. Precarious or poorly compensated jobs, such as those currently on offer in the gig economy, would inevitably become more expensive for companies. They would need to pay higher wages and to provide benefits if they still wanted to rely on a flexible workforce. In this way, the job guarantee is a more powerful tool in terms of social protection than a universal basic income. With a basic income, employers would know that their employees are not going to starve, even if they are paid less. Therefore, the basic income the state provides to ensure people live in dignity could quickly turn into a subsidy for low wages in the private sector. The job guarantee, on the other hand, pushes wages up.

The idea behind how a job guarantee would be financed is rooted in ‘Modern Monetary Theory’, a macroeconomic theory which sees the monopoly supply of currency as the essential role of sovereign government. Through the issuance of fiat money, the government has an unlimited capacity to pay for the goods it wishes to purchase and to fulfil promised future payments. And one of the things that a government may want to pay for are workers who cannot find work in the private sector. However, this requirement also means that such a policy cannot be implemented in the Eurozone. Member States would have to return to their national currencies to set the ground for a just and sustainable economy through a jobs guarantee.

KIM FREDERICQ
EVANGELISTA

BASIC INCOME TO BOOST SOCIAL SECURITY IN BELGIUM

The Belgian welfare system was created after World War Two and has improved over time. Social protection is relatively good and most social benefits ensure people receive an income above the poverty threshold. Yet there are some gaps in the current system and, as it is too dependent on economic growth, the taxation of labour, and high employment, it is not sufficiently prepared for the new challenges facing the labour market. Ultimately our system and politicians are

fixated on growth to the point of addiction. But we will not return to the same levels of economic growth experienced in the 1960s and 1970s (which were also responsible for serious environmental damage). French speaking Belgian Green party Ecolo's proposal for universal basic income (UBI) aims to address those challenges, while at the same time tackling Belgium's persistent poverty and inequality.

The system today is relatively good at protecting insiders, but the same cannot be said for outsiders including young people, migrants, part-time workers, and the less educated. Insiders were typically those people, usually men, who started a job after graduating that would see them through to retirement. They were the product of a system created under and that assumed full employment. Today, when 25 per cent of young people mainly in urban areas cannot find a job and offshoring, robotisation, and new career paths are the new reality, such a system is obsolete.

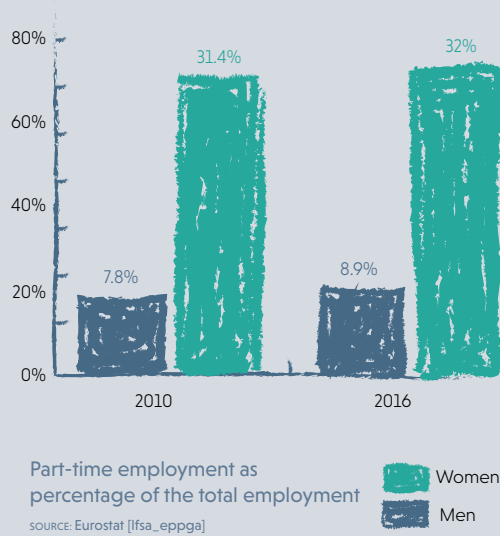
While the existing system fails to protect all citizens, Ecolo's UBI proposal will extend coverage to people having mixed and atypical career paths too. It would partly shield against the fact that, in Belgium, you lose part of your previous pension contributions when you move from employee status to being self-employed. UBI would extend protection to the many young people currently excluded. As is, you

need to have worked to receive unemployment benefit, whereas most young people today begin their careers with several internships which are often not formally recognised as employment. Importantly, the UBI would calculate social rights on an individual basis, which is especially critical from a gender point of view. While social contributions are assessed and paid on an individual basis through salaries, most social benefits (such as unemployment benefits and pensions) are given back to individuals adjusted to their household situation. Therefore today a woman may not receive the full benefits that she has contributed towards, just because she is part of a household with a rich partner. Finally, the current system does not provide positive labour market incentives. Citizens lose their benefits when they return to work, creating an inactivity trap in the case of low wages, and because social security is financed through labour taxation, it is expensive for organisations to hire people.

Ecolo favours a social security system financed through higher taxes on consumption, cars, pollution, and financial revenues, and less on labour. But this tax shift would not be sufficient to finance a full-fledged individual UBI. To make it affordable, a trade-off is necessary and existing revenues would need to be adjusted. For example, someone with a full-time job and an above average salary would receive the UBI but would also pay more taxes on other sources of income, so the final monetary

result will be small. An unemployed person would receive the UBI, but would also receive a reduced unemployment benefit (reduced by an amount smaller than the UBI, leaving them overall in a better financial situation). For most people, their net incomes would not change much. But for the poorest, for those working part time with low wages, for young people, and for others outside the system, this will make a huge impact to their financial situation.

Ecolo's UBI scheme would create a new pillar of the Belgian social security system, in addition to unemployment benefit, pensions, family allowances, and so on. The amount would at first be a non-taxable 600 euros per month for each person over 18 years old (from birth to 18 years it would be 300 euros) – an insufficient amount to live on without additional support from the Belgian general welfare system. The UBI has been fixed at that amount so as to be sustainable for the state and because it is not meant to replace the existing welfare system entirely. Ecolo sees the UBI as a way to strengthen the so-called 'autonomous sphere', yet it shouldn't encourage people to leave the labour market completely.¹ It should help increase the time spent outside of the market sphere and thus increase the real freedom of every individual. True and concrete freedom requires that you have an income.

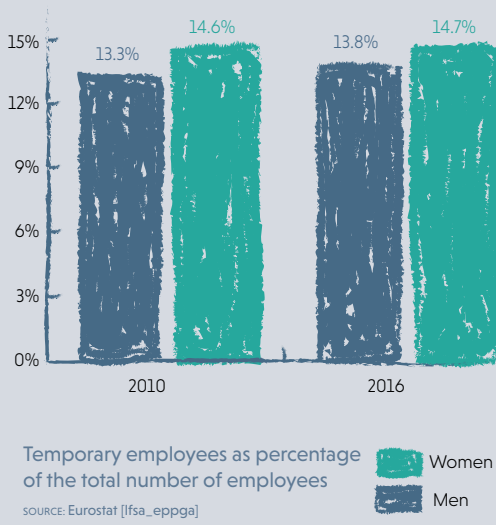


LÁSZLÓ ANDOR

EUROPEAN UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

The last few years have shown that, in times of crisis, growing unemployment and poverty mainly affect the countries at the periphery of the EU. These countries must be compensated somehow for not having the capacity to react to crises via currency devaluations or interest rate adjustments. The easiest and most cost-effective way to do so would be common financial support for cyclical unemployment. In 2010 to 2011, as the Eurozone crisis deepened, a number of calculations indicated that such a mechanism would have helped the Eurozone get out of the crisis much earlier, and at much lower cost. With this in mind, an unemployment insurance scheme would be an important first step in providing security for our people, at least in the short run.

1 In today's post-industrial society, ecologists and Green parties are looking beyond the Left-Right debate to promote the 'autonomous sphere' against the influence of both the market and the state. The autonomous sphere can be seen as a category of productive activities creating goods and services that are neither sold on the market nor commissioned by a public authority.



The introduction of an unemployment insurance scheme would not require a large sum. The current EU budget (which mainly includes transfers between EU countries) is 1 per cent of the EU's GDP. An additional 1 per cent, to fund a fiscal capacity for unemployment, would be enough to guarantee the stability of the Eurozone. As unemployment is often declining, there would not be constant need for recourse to the fund for most countries. The proposal is, first and foremost, an economic question, and only secondly a social one. As reallocating funds would uphold the purchasing power of countries affected by rising unemployment in times of crisis, such a transfer would act as a stabiliser supporting Europe's overall growth rate. This stabilising effect would see the invested money, or at least a part of it, return in the form of growing demand.

The simplest way of starting such a project would be to build a system that would

effectively insure national unemployment benefit schemes. Individual workers would not need to do anything, but Member States would enter a risk community. A certain amount of harmonisation would be needed so that the transfer does not simply function as a budget support but actually protects countries and workers in difficulty. National models could continue to have their differences, but the common core would provide basic protection and function as an economic and social stabiliser. At a time when many Europeans only see the EU as a set of constraints, it would represent tangible solidarity in hard times for the most vulnerable groups.

Today we face the rather long-term labour market challenge of reconciling new forms of employment with existing social standards. Some countries have been working on this, such as the United Kingdom where the gig economy is very advanced. But the EU also has a role to play, and work has already started in the context of the European Pillar of Social Rights. If social issues receive enough attention during the next election campaign for the European Parliament in 2019, the next Commission will have to make real proposals in this area. Social rights will have to be revisited regardless of what happens with Eurozone reform. Because, as some countries do not include gig workers in their social security systems, they could not be helped by any European risk-sharing scheme.

Decent living should not and cannot rely on employment alone and, since having a job is not guaranteed in a market economy, countries need to develop minimum income schemes. This is why the EU has promoted the introduction of these schemes, for example in Greece and Italy. However, it is important to distinguish between a minimum income and unemployment insurance. For a reasonably long period, a newly unemployed person needs to be compensated for lost income, which can be much higher than the absolute minimum. Second, while the EU can promote minimum income schemes and provide technical assistance, it cannot be expected to fund such schemes, perhaps with the exception of some pilot projects. As a final point, regulation plays an important role in influencing the pace at which the gig economy is introduced, so that society has enough time to adapt. For example, Poland has ruled that the self-employed have to earn at least the minimum wage, minimising the risk that self-employment would exclude them from social security. In general, it must be made clear that changes in the labour market and the welfare system are not driven by technology alone, but rather are under the control of democratic decisions and social dialogue.

LUCILE SCHMID

GREENING BASIC INCOME

A universal basic income is a means to many ends. It could be a path to greater choice and autonomy, reducing poverty, or merely reforming social security. The basic income debate has come back to life – perhaps in part because it is a way to set the cat among the pigeons, to speak plainly about social protection systems that are near exhaustion.

But what exactly are we talking about? Universal basic income can be defined as paying citizens of a given political community an equal monthly personal income with no conditions regarding needs or means, and with nothing due in return.² In the past few years, the question of basic income has gained public attention, and trials are underway in Finland, Barcelona, several French departments, and through the ‘My Basic Income’ crowdfunded initiatives in France and Germany. During the 2017 French presidential campaign, Socialist candidate Benoît Hamon proposed a form of basic income, suggesting upgrading the ‘active solidarity income’ (‘revenu de solidarité active’) and its extension to young people between 18 and 25. Hamon described his idea as a “social security for the 21st century”, emphasising the lack of jobs in our era of robotisation. In a show of support, philosopher Dominique Méda highlighted how, as the only

2 Guillaume Allègre & Henri Sterdyniak (Feb. 2017). Faut-il instaurer un revenu universel? *Alternatives Économiques*. bit.ly/2Flnk3O

candidate discussing the worsening terms of employment and calling for the creation of sustainable jobs for the future, Hamon was “tipping the Left’s ideological corpus towards ecology.”

While the ongoing basic income trials breathe new life into the discussion and allow for fresh evaluation of the proposal at smaller scales, the debate continues to revolve around the merits (or lack thereof) of generalising a basic income. Experiments are limited by definition (in Finland, the national experiment is based on 2000 unemployed people), so can we really draw the conclusions to justify rolling out what would be a social ‘big bang’? Points in favour include simplifying bureaucracy and making sure people receive the benefits they are entitled to. Findings will be conditioned by the representativeness of the samples (are the better-off included?) and resultant behavioural changes will vary according to the experiments’ timeframes and scales. There is also the question of how to finance a basic income. Changes to taxation will play out differently in different tax systems (should financing be as universal as the income?) and vary according to the size of a country. Officially, social protection is under pressure due to funding concerns, but there are deeper ideological forces at work. Basic income is sometimes seen as a liberal Trojan horse, lowering social benefits for those who need them most. That it has

supporters on the Right (notably Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek), as well as the Left, makes this possibility all the more credible. Designing a basic income, its amount (400 or 800 euros?), and how it is calculated, paid, and financed, is not therefore an academic debate. There are big questions to be answered on the social contract, redistribution, and, indeed, the transformation of the entire social project.

With this in mind, it is worth examining proposals that link basic income to ecological transition, as Sophie Swaton advocates. She argues that if you see the universal income as a panacea to solve unemployment, reinvigorate social life, and stimulate green or citizen initiatives, you risk reaching none of these goals. Swaton instead seeks a step towards ‘another view of society’, one characterised by the transformation of relations between humans beings and the environment. To achieve this transformation, she proposes an income scheme that couples payments and support measures with ecological or social activities. The proposal bridges political ecology with social economy, and calls for the creation of deliberative, democratic structures to oversee this transition. Priority would be given to ecological initiatives in areas such as housing, public information, transport, and shared governance. The ecological basic income proposal has three components. It maintains the link between income

and activity. It is not limited to monetary income, but includes support measures, and membership in a democratic structure (such as an association or cooperative) is required. More than being a proposal just about income, it engages people in collective efforts to protect the planet and move away from growth.

The debate on basic income cannot be limited to social protection; the questions it raises are much broader: societal, individual, and institutional. The debate is so far reaching as to be premature. It runs the risk of brushing aside the question of work and the place it occupies in our lives. Because, for many, work is more than exploitation and the forfeit of happiness. Should we really give up on workers' rights and full employment? The shift should not be made lightly. Basic income will not perform miracles. Two essential questions must be answered first: how to both share work across society and achieve the ecological transition.



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LUCILE SCHMID

is co-president of the Green European Foundation (GEF). She is a senior official in the Ministry of Economy and Finances in France.



VILLE YLIKAHRI

is secretary general at Visio, the Green Finnish think-tank. He is also a GEF board member.

LIGHTENING LABOUR'S LOAD

AN ATLAS OF GREEN TAX ALTERNATIVES

Most governments in the European Union receive the largest share of their revenues from the taxation of employed labour income, followed by capital and consumption. In the face of the many unfolding changes to the world of work, the *Green European Journal* asked what could be the alternatives or complements in terms of taxation, and how the way labour is taxed could be improved.

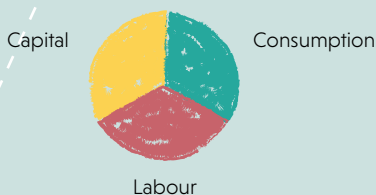
A series of experts from Green parties and organisations in different countries answered the two questions below. They come from Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. Alongside their answers, a pie chart shows the existing distribution of the country's total tax burden between capital, consumption, and labour.

1

In the majority of cases in the European Union, taxes on employed labour are the largest source of national government revenue. What are the alternatives to labour taxes – not meaning a total substitute but other avenues to explore – proposed by the Greens (party or movement) in your country, if at all?

2

Throughout Europe the challenge is often not how to replace or supplement taxes on employed labour income but how to improve them. How do Greens suggest improving labour taxes in your country?



Distribution of the total tax burden according to type of tax base in 2015 (percentage)

SOURCE: 'Taxation trends in the European Union – 2017 edition' European Commission

ITALY

EDOARDO ZANCHINI
LEGAMBIENTE



1

The Greens would reduce labour taxation by intervening in two environmental issues: firstly, abolishing direct and indirect fossil fuel subsidies, worth about 15 billion euros per year, and secondly, through adequate taxation of activities with high environmental impact, such as quarries, bottled water, beach concessions, and road freight transport.

2

The Greens emphasise the need to redefine taxation on labour and production to drive the transition to a green, sharing economy. For example, VAT on goods must be differentiated on the basis of environmental and social objectives in order to reward innovation, quality, and protect labour rights.

1

Greens propose first to strengthen taxation of pollution and CO₂ emissions. Our guiding principle is to 'tax bads, not goods'. It is equally important to fight the declining share of taxes on capital as one of the drivers behind rising inequality of income and wealth.

2

The Greens think that the taxation of labour income is very unequal in Germany. People with lower incomes who receive social benefits often have higher marginal tax rates than the rich. The tax system should be made more progressive and should encourage employment.

GERMANY

LISA PAUS
BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN



HUNGARY

LÁSZLÓ HELTAI

LEHET MÁS A POLITIKA



1

The goal is to reduce tax on labour and increase tax on capital and resource use, which refers not just to pollution but also natural resources such as land, water, forest, and air. Resource taxes will be applied according to social quotas and through calculations built in to the prices of goods.

2

LMP proposes a progressive income tax instead of the current flat tax, and a reduction of the burden on the less wealthy. We would like to apply this to every type of income, be it from labour, capital (interests, shares, enterprises, wealth), or from any another source.

1

The Czech government should eliminate the excessive number of exemptions and simplify the tax system. The Greens recommend measures to fight tax havens in cooperation with other EU countries. Broadening the tax base is also desirable, especially through carbon and pesticide taxes.

2

In the Czech Republic, there is a lack of consensus on the main parameters of the tax system, so broader consensus will be the main goal of any sustainable tax reform. More concretely, the Greens support progressive labour income taxes and pairing the labour income tax reform with pension reform.

CZECH REPUBLIC

JAROMIR BAXA

STRANA ZELENÝCH



1

FINLAND

KATJA ALVOITTU

VIHREÄT DE GRÖNA



The Greens propose raising the property tax and introducing a sugar tax calculated by the product's sugar content; as well as diminishing tax subsidies for environmentally harmful fuels, such as peat and light fuel oil for heating, and for industry and companies. We would also raise tax on shareholders of unlisted companies.

2

In order to improve the profitability of work, Greens have argued for the taxation of low-paid work to be reduced. Another problem has been the so-called income conversion, where high earnings are converted into lighter-taxed dividends. The taxation of dividends must be tightened.

1

In addition to carbon and consumption taxes, one new form of taxation that will soon be a necessity and will limit the extent of income tax will be on automated, non-human work and services: robots, self-driving cars, and automated functionality.

2

Labour taxation must lead to a just sharing of wealth without hampering pay increases. One way to do this is to implement additional taxation of excess income relative to the pay of other employees: high earners are taxed additionally if their income is much larger than that of their coworkers.

POLAND

PRZEMYSŁAW STĘPIEŃ

PARTIA ZIELONI



1

DENMARK

LISBETH BECH
POULSEN

SOCIALISTISK FOLKEPARTI



SF works towards and supports a new CO₂ tax to replace the quota system, as well as taxes on environmentally unfriendly consumption. We have also pushed for Denmark to join the European countries for a financial transaction tax and, at home, to tax capital gains at (as a minimum) the same level as income income.

2

In recent years, reforms have gone in the wrong direction and fairer, more progressive labour taxes are needed. Taxation must be raised on the highest earners, a wealth tax should be reintroduced, and tax authorities should be strengthened to combat creative tax loops and tax evasion schemes used mostly by high earners.

1

As part of the government, the Swedish Greens have introduced taxes on chemicals and on passenger flights. At the same time, we lowered social taxes for entrepreneurs employing their first colleague and introduced an income tax reduction on repairs of white goods.

2

The Greens have made income tax more progressive since becoming part of the government. Recently, we proposed to lower the income tax and social taxes (that employers pay) in some remote areas as a way to encourage people to live in rural areas with decreasing populations.

SWEDEN

LARS GREGER

MILJÖPARTIET DE GRÖNA



1

Greens promote environmental taxes through direct taxation on profits depending on the environmental impact of economic activities, alongside indirect taxation of consumption of goods and services causing environmental degradation, e.g. plastic bags, air flights, and gasoline. VAT calculation should be redesigned to incorporate criteria for sustainability and social justice.

2

Greens want transparent, understandable, applicable tax rules and sustainable common European tax policy. Also, fairness and sustainability criteria for tax-free amounts and deductions from taxable income, uniform and redistributive taxation with (more) staggered rates, assets declaration for all, and a tax-free amount equal to the declared income of the last 10 years.

GREECE

CHRISTINA EFTHIMIATOU

OIKOLOGOI PRASINOI



THE NETHERLANDS

BART SNELS

GROENLINKS



1

GroenLinks proposes several green taxes, including a higher tax on meat, CO₂, and kerosene. We also want to promote a circular economy and put higher taxes on packaging. Our proposed 'Piketty tax' is a progressive tax on capital: wealthy people earning high interest should pay a fair amount of taxes.

2

Greens want to make the taxation of labour more progressive. For people with very low salaries there should be a negative labour tax. Moreover, we want to simplify the tax system because it has become way too complicated for Dutch citizens.

1

Since 2013, labour taxes in France have already been partially replaced by VAT increases and carbon taxes, with negative consequences for low-income households. The issue now is to extend carbon taxes to agriculture, fisheries, and road transport and to introduce ecological VAT, which means a change in European directives.

2

Greens are reflecting on indexing social contributions on a social rating included in a Social and Environmental Responsibility Report. This would mean standardising the indicators throughout Europe and controlling them. We also promote enlarging the social contribution base to include capital revenues.

FRANCE

EVA SAS

EUROPE ÉCOLOGIE-
LES VERTS



BULGARIA

VLADISLAV PANEV

ZELENIITE



1

In Bulgaria, indirect taxes such as VAT are the main source of the national budget revenue. Still, it is necessary to further stimulate working people's net incomes by reducing taxation, especially on lower earners. Higher taxation on pollution or fuel taxes could also contribute to the national budget.

2

Currently there is a 10 per cent flat income tax in Bulgaria. Social and health costs are very expensive. Zelenite is seeking changes to the pension system to make it more stable and give people more freedom to manage their funds. We also advocate for zero tax for people on low incomes.

1

In Groen, we propose a tax shift from low wages to capital and pollution in order to combat low-skilled unemployment, make the wealthy contribute, and discourage pollution. As regards to capital, we propose a capital gains tax, and for pollution, a CO₂ tax.

BELGIUM

ANTHONY BAERT &
DAAN ISEBAERT

GROEN



2

In Belgium, employees and the self-employed are subjected to a different social security regime. Groen proposes to create a single social security system for both. We also want to radically weed out tax deductions and replace them by direct subsidies or at least tax credits.

1

The main alternatives are environmental taxation on waste, energy, nuclear power, fuel, cars (owning, buying new, company cars, smart distance fee), and CO₂ emissions. Ecolo also advocates in favour of increasing taxes on high wealth, financial transactions, capital gains, fighting fiscal fraud, and the reduction of loopholes in corporation taxes.

BELGIUM

KIM FREDERICQ
EVANGELISTA

ECOLO

2

Ecolo wants to tax labour and financial incomes at the same progressive rates in order to have a broader tax base and thus decrease the rates. We propose to finance social security more through the general tax system, and we want a higher progressivity of social contributions and labour taxes.

SPAIN

ANA MARIA ÁLVAREZ

EQUO



1

Equo supports new green taxes (and the reform of existing ones) favouring sustainability and penalising pollution in sectors including construction, waste management, repairs, transport, electricity production, and water. We would also repeal the 'sun tax', which has caused a slump in the household production of solar energy by taxing those with solar panels.

2

The current labour taxation system in Spain increases inequality and penalises the weakest links in society. The Greens want to make the system more progressive and equal across the autonomous communities of the country, and increase tax on assets so that those who have more pay more.

1

Greens have proposed a land value tax, a financial transactions tax, a wealth tax, and pollution and resource taxes, including a carbon tax. These taxes are mainly to enable us to increase public expenditure or reduce VAT, but we would also abolish National Insurance paid by employers.

2

Greens would make employment taxes more progressive with effectively a negative income tax for low earners (through Citizen's Income) and higher rates for higher earners. We would absorb employees' National Insurance (which only applies to employment income) into income tax, equalising tax on all income, including income arising from property.

UNITED KINGDOM

BRIAN HEATLEY

GREEN PARTY OF ENGLAND AND WALES



1

IRELAND

MARK DREARY

COMHAONTAS GLAS



Irish Greens would return to a 13.5 per cent VAT rate for the hospitality sector – the 9 per cent rate was an emergency measure during the recession – and introduce an aggregates tax, a site value tax, and a sugar tax. We would also equalise the cost of diesel and petrol and remove inflationary supports for home buying.

2

Greens want basic income to be introduced starting this year with the introduction of refundable tax credits supporting lower earners, and initiating a policy shift that measures previously unpaid labour such as work in the home.

SOLIDARITY FOREVER

TALKING TRANSITION WITH TRADE UNIONS

AN INTERVIEW WITH
PHILIPPE POCHET
BY **LAURENT**
STANDAERT

Far bigger than parties and more organised than activists, trade unions remain among the most powerful political forces in Europe today. Any successful transition to a sustainable future, for workers and for the planet as a whole, will need them firmly on board. Philippe Pochet, from the European Trade Union Institute, discusses how the ambitions of the trade union movement are evolving and the promises that lie in alliances with Greens.

LAURENT STANDAERT: The question of the future of work seems to be back on the agenda today. What is the state of the debate and reflection within the European trade union movement?

PHILIPPE POCHET: From the point of view of the unions, the discussion on the future of the work can be summed up in a key idea: the need for a transition. A new world is taking shape, as much in terms of climate change as of digitalisation. What shifts are needed to avoid workers losing out? Luca Visentini, Secretary General of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), said in early 2018 that it is necessary to think about a European transition fund, similar to the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund but more substantial, for the next seven-year budget of the European Union. European trade unions in recent years, even decades, have certainly put a strong emphasis on the climate, notably through the concept of 'just transition' and at the United Nations' annual climate summits. But this reflection and the need to support the transition have become even more profound in light of the digital question. At the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) we have a Foresight Unit, for which resolving climate change and the digital question are a priority. In the trade union world, there is a consensus on the fact that we face a significant transition. While nobody knows

the exact destination, we nevertheless need to anticipate what lies ahead with a serious, grand-scale approach.

Are national trade unions also leading the way on climate change and technology?

PHILIPPE POCHET: It varies from one country to another. On the climate issue for example, there is a strong consensus within the European trade union family, apart from perhaps a few Polish trade unions. The difficulty is that we are just beginning to emerge from a decade of austerity. Before the 2008 crisis, there was quite a strong momentum around ‘transition’ issues. The crisis and the Barroso Commission era provided the opportunity for a general attack on workers’ rights, union rights, and trade union institutions. The situation forced the unions to defend the basics – their achievements, the progress they have made, and their members – and also to focus on essentials in terms of their reflection: salary schemes and inequality. The crisis is not over, but spaces for dialogue appear to be opening up, on the climate among other areas, after having been shelved for a long time.

If we look at the climate issue, there are two levels: a discursive level and a more concrete one. Some interesting declarations have been made by key institutions at the global level, such as the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). But this does

not involve negotiations or partners with real influence. At the level of the ETUC and the European trade union federations, and then at the level of the national federations, declarations have a real impact. The case of the chemical industrial sector is telling: their focus is on employment in the sector and is certainly less ambitious than the international level on climate issues, but their impact is tangible and their objectives are realistic and negotiated.

On robotisation, the trade union IG Metall in Germany is carrying out one of the most extensive and realistic studies on the automotive industry, on the transition from combustion to electric vehicles, and the impact in terms of employment. The abstract discussions at the global level are necessary, but this transition must be thought of in the real world of industry and employment. The European level is not more ‘advanced’ than the national level, they complement one another, simply because the industry and workers have an interest in doing so, as the German example shows.

Before looking forward to transition, what is the situation in the European labour market?

PHILIPPE POCHET: The two real problems of the labour market at the European level up until now have been division and non-convergence. Just 10 to 15 years ago, it was

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OR STRATEGIC
VISION

still thought that all EU countries would converge. This has not happened. The chosen model ended in failure: little solidarity and competition between national labour markets which saw workers ultimately squeezed as 'costs'. This model was vigorously pursued by the Barroso Commission which breached the tacit agreement that "the market operates at the European level and the welfare state protects at the national level" to the benefit of the market across the board. The situation led to forced mobility for some and to the rise of populism for others. How do you tell workers in the East that they will earn 350 euros per month and on top of that receive a pension of 150 euros? With no prospects, the result was the displacement of workers without proper protections in place and without any reflection on a social Europe.

Along the same lines, the recent developments on the posted workers directive are interesting because they signal a realisation that change needs to happen and that the current model – never truly thought of as a common project – is bankrupt. Today the European Union offers no vision. It has imposed macroeconomic constraints upon itself and completely left aside the meso-economic level, that of production, division of labour, and specialisations among states. If we want to talk about transition, we can't keep pursuing this 'low-cost' model that lacks objectives or strategic vision. Similarly, the recent discussions under the Juncker Commission of a renewal of the 'social pillar' have some promise, even if relatively vague at this stage. Nevertheless, we can see a dialogue on a medium-term strategy emerging, in which Europe would protect but also project itself as a force for industry and research.

To make the necessary transition(s) a reality, you speak of the need for alliances between Green and trade union movements.

PHILIPPE POCHET: There are two elements that seem essential to me. The first is the importance of collective actors for a broad change that is stable and sustainable. I think that Greens, for the most part, have



an overly individualistic perspective when it comes to change. It is laudable and important that people eat less meat, cycle more, and so forth. But the question of scale is crucial here. Collective actors are key to ensure the sustainability of any transition, certainly in the face of challenges such as climate change. Among the major institutions of the 19th century – churches, political parties, and trade unions – it is unions that remain the most present and active, with around 40 million members in Europe. Secondly, we need to steer the discourse of transition away from ‘experts’. Eloi Laurent, with whom I co-authored an essay on the eco-social transition, reminds us that telling people we’re headed for catastrophe and “we told you so” does not help to mobilise citizens and voters. A stance that says “we are right, but we are 5 per cent of the population” will get us nowhere. Changing society takes time, it requires groups to form alliances. Paradigm shifts happen but never in the short term, and nobody knows when the tipping point will be.

These elements are important because change requires more than majorities. A short-term majority made up of Leftists and Greens, for example, is not safe from the likes of Trump, who can unravel everything. In such cases, the question of substantive and long-term change remains open. Alliances must be built beyond electoral calculations and the only tool that works for that is deliberation:

dialogue and efforts over a long period to build strong consensuses and the willingness to discuss differences. To take an example from the private sector, the business with the most interest in, and expertise on, climate change are insurance companies. Yet many progressives will not speak to insurers because they belong to ‘a different world’.

Can you give concrete examples of these alliances?

PHILIPPE POCHET: To unite as widely as possible doesn’t necessarily require a long and detailed programme of demands. On the contrary, what’s needed are a few strategic points liable to gradually win over the greatest possible number. It is a complex task because opposition to change can sometimes be head-on. We can take the route of ‘consensus tables’ and ‘conflict tables’.

An interesting example in the area of climate change is that of the cooperation between the Trade Union Congress in the UK and Greenpeace, who have set out their points of consensus and their differences in a single document, on issues such as carbon capture. Another is the work of [MEP and Greens/EFA co-chair] Philippe Lamberts with the Belgian trade unions, the ETUC, and the ETUI, around opening up a dialogue for post-growth or degrowth discussions with EU Commission officials and other stakeholders.

In all cases, we must provide opportunities for workers and their environments and families, and not simply say, “You are the past.”

The experience of the transition out of the coal sector in Western Europe teaches us this lesson and the significant costs attached to it. How can we provide workers with prospects and suitable alternatives? The sorting and recycling sector is a

very telling example. It is in full growth but the working conditions are terrible. The issues of quality of employment as well as health and safety at work are points around which dialogue can be constructed, and where the parties can see their principles and values defended.

In the medium term, what should be the priorities for such collaboration between ecologists and trade unions?

PHILIPPE POCHET: There are a lot of areas of potential convergence. It seems to me that the overarching question for many of the discussions is that of inequalities. To take the example of quality of employment: someone who works in a company with poor health and safety conditions is often also the one who lives near the motorway or in unenviable environmental conditions. The relatively large

overlap between social and environmental injustice has been clearly shown to exist.

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We shouldn't downplay the complexity of the task, however. A better redistribution of wealth will not automatically bring about a decrease in CO₂ emissions. If there is a better redistribution and everyone goes on

holidays to the south of Europe with Ryanair, the overall result is likely to be disappointing. But don't people seek certain elements of quality rather than mass consumption? If redistribution means better access to high-quality public services such as nurseries, and if as a society we chart where we are headed, the environmental results will be within reach too.

In the very short term though, I personally do not see any alternative to a regulated Green capitalism. I think that is the only way to speed up the technological development necessary for transitions, and for us then to be able to move on to a different phase. We need businesses and entrepreneurs – for example in places that aren't very Green, such as Texas, where we're seeing the strongest growth in the production of solar and wind energy – that invest in renewable energy and increase its capacity. Unless everyone stops

consuming, I don't see an alternative in the short term, because the social forces needed aren't present, let alone in the majority.

Are Greens too dogmatic or rigid to move forward in alliances?

PHILIPPE POCHET: There have been many successful collaborations between Green and labour movements. But ultimately, ecologist movements represent a kind of enlightened middle class. It has the means to ensure its intellectual comfort and with a certain discourse on a transition, which has largely remained confined within its circles, it has made it difficult to strike up dialogue with the world of work. In my view, now is the time to return to a discussion that has never really taken place around the stereotypes that each has in relation to the other, and to get back to the basics on the issues of equality, work, and transition. The unions are movements that defend workers and their interests. This does not mean that unions do not defend the interests of the poorest and those outside the world of wage employment, but it allows for cooperation free of ambiguity. Cooperation is about 'getting people to work together' even if they don't have the same interests nor represent the same groups. My feeling is that sometimes Greens want to represent everyone and no one at once, which is not always conducive to the clarity needed for cooperation. ■



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The *Green European Journal* is an editorially independent publication of the Green European Foundation. A platform for ideas spanning Europe's cultural and political borders, the Journal encourages debate among Greens and contributes to the building of a European public space. The Journal collaborates regularly with partner publications and correspondents across Europe. Thematic editions explore a topic in depth from different analytical and cultural perspectives. The *Green European Journal* also publishes regular articles and interviews in various languages online. Find them all on the website, on social media, and in our monthly newsletter.

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WORK ON THE HORIZON

TRACKING EMPLOYMENT'S TRANSFORMATION IN EUROPE

By the steady march of demographic change as much as by the viral advance of technology, the world of work and the many structures we built around it are being twisted out of shape. The threat of insecurity and redundancy, and the dark politics that come with it, contrast with the fresh possibilities that new ways of working open up, for the individual as for society as a whole. Yet with this uncertain future, reduced working hours, enhanced autonomy, and a shift away from a society organised around work are part of the conversation again across Europe. Greens and progressives will need to be forward-thinking and to work closely with social partners on education, social protection, and industrial policy to steer society towards a different, more sustainable, way of living. Europe must be at the centre of this debate, its continued prosperity in a wider world is at stake. This edition addresses the future of work as the key political question of our time. The Green European Journal contends that, in answering it, we can make valuable steps forward towards living more secure, healthy, and meaningful lives.

